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SHORT STORIES

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THE GIFT OF THE GODS.

"Now then, Mrs. Heyer, how are we to-day? Is the tea ready? I am just dying for mine! Oh! I beg your pardon. You have a visitor, I see. Don't let me interrupt you."

The speaker, a good-looking man of about thirty, would have withdrawn at once, had not Old Margit eagerly called to him to come in.

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THE GIFT OF THE GODS.

By Mrs. GEORGE CORBETT.

CHAPTER I.

I Meet My Fate.

I STAND at my bedroom window, and look wistfully out upon the scene below, wondering why my life should be so much greyer than that of my cousin Millie, who, I tell myself, has no more right to be petted and indulged than I have. There is to be a bicycle picnic this afternoon, to which I have been looking forward all the week, and it is only within the last half hour that I have become aware of the disappointment in store for me.

Millie and I are orphans, the only children of two sisters, and we have both been very well provided for under our grandfather's will.

To his surviving daughter, Aunt Hagar, to wit, he has bequeathed half his property absolutely, with power to will it as she pleases at her own death.

The other half is divided equally between my cousin and myself. But as we are both minors, we are placed under the guardianship of Aunt Hagar until we come of age. So far, things are equal between us. But it is soon impressed upon me that I must not expect to share my aunt's favour in an equal degree.

I have been told that beauty is the gift of the gods, and I have often wondered why the gods should have been so niggardly with me, when they had so many of their favours to bestow upon Millie. Aunt Hagar openly laments my ugliness, and she just as openly accentuates the difference between her two nieces, by providing all sorts of beautiful clothes for Millie, while I have fain to be content with garments which I know perfectly well to be cruelly unbecoming.

"There is some pleasure in dressing you prettily, my darling!" I once heard her say to Millie, "for you can be made to look like a perfect fairy. But it is only waste of time and money to take pains with Lady Mary Ann, for she grows plainer every day."

Lady Mary Ann!

Lest anyone imagines that I am entitled to put a handle to my name, let me promptly disillusion them. My name is simply another of my trials. Perhaps my father and mother did not mind being called Miggs. But I mind it, and I shall never be able to forgive them for tacking "Mary Ann" on to it.

Mary Ann Miggs! Was there ever such a conjunction?

The nickname did not displease me until Aunt Hagar and Millie got hold of it, and tacked it on to the obnoxious "Mary Ann." The joke must have proved immensely amusing to them, for they never dream of calling me anything else but "Lady Mary Ann," and as I peer through the back of my muslin curtains I hear it spoken by two or three people.

"Where is Lady Mary Ann?" inquires Aline Darcy, giving a final look to her machine, to see that everything is in order before she starts on her twenty mile spin.

"Yes," chimes in Edgar Courtney. "I understood she was going with us. Hurry up, Miss Vernon, and tell her that we cannot wait if she doesn't come quickly."

"There is no need to wait," replies Millie's high-pitched treble. "Lady Mary Ann is not coming with us."

"What a nuisance!" grumbles Courtenay, and for the first time in my life I feel grateful to him. We have practically grown up together. But his behaviour towards me seems to have been always marked by studied indifference, and now he is actually showing himself disappointed at my failure to join the picnic party!

"Yes, it is a nuisance," he repeats. "I don't mind saying that Lady Mary Ann is the best rider I know. She isn't afraid of doing a bit of scorching, and I quite counted upon having an exciting run with her while everybody else was jogging along with decorous caution."

"Really!" sneers Millie. "It is quite interesting, I am sure! Why, it was only yesterday that I heard you make fun of that hideous nose of hers."

There is a moment's pause, during which my heart thumps furiously, and I almost feel as if I could kill Millie for having thus maliciously destroyed my dawning belief in Edgar Courtney's liking for me.

Mind I have no desire to win Edgar Courtney's love, for I am quite sure that in no case would he realize my ideal of a lover. But I do so hunger for a little real friendship. And surely Millie has no need to begrudge it to me, for she has enough and to spare.

"Now I do call that too bad of you," retorts Edgar. "It was you who made fun of her nose, and I only said that I thought it was an awful pity she couldn't change it for a new one, because she would really be a very handsome woman then. But why is she not coming with us?"

"Oh, I don't know," was the petulant reply. "She's changed her mind, I suppose. You never know how to take crotc' etty people like her. There, now we are all ready, I think."

There are a few false starts, and then a merry departure is made. A dozen bicycle bells ring vigorously for a few minutes, and I am left alone, with the bitter thoughts which are by no means toned down by the last injustice of which Millie has been guilty towards me. I don't know that ever I anticipated an outing of any sort with such pleasure as I anticipated this bicycle picnic, and I am sure that there is no earthly reason why Aunt Hagar should have forbidden me to go out this afternoon.

There are visitors coming, she says, and she requires my assistance in entertaining them. But I know perfectly well that when the visitors arrive (if, indeed, they are really expected) my presence will be quietly ignored, and if I venture to join in a conversation I shall be favoured with sundry icy glances which I have no difficulty in understanding as a silent injunction to hold my tongue.

Read the next footline backwards.

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Yet Millie has deliberately led her companions to believe that caprice on my part is the sole reason for my absence from the picnic, and that my temper is so variable and uncertain that it is not pleasant to approach me.

"Oh, there you are," my aunt says, looking at me with grim disapproval in her face. "I suppose you thought you would take your time before you condescended to come downstairs to me.

"You know very well that the Derekthornes are coming here this afternoon, and that Lady Derekthorne is passionately fond of strawberries. You know also that our strawberries are finer than anybody else's. But as you are not considerate enough to offer to gather a few of them, I am compelled to *ask* you to do so."

It does not take me very long to gather a basketful of the delicious berries, for we have a large quantity, and they are of unusual size and quality.

When my task is finished, I look admiringly at the fruit, and then a daring resolve comes to me.

"I have a good mind to pay Aunt Hagar off for being so ill-natured," I tell myself. "It is nothing but spite which has made her spoil my afternoon for me, and I don't think I owe her the slightest consideration. Neither do I care to exert myself for that horrid Lady Derekthorpe and her sister-in-law, who do nothing but talk scandal all the time they are here. Fancy me having to give up the lovely ride to Carisvale in order to spend the afternoon in such company! I don't think I will do it! In fact I won't!"

Having made this momentous resolve, I straightway begin to act up on it by lifting up the basket of strawberries, and taking them into the arbour to await my return.

Then I avail myself of the shelter which is afforded me by the lilac shrubbery, and slip round the offside of it to the toolhouse, wherein Millie and I store our bicycles.

I have just time to my escape without being seen. But I know very well that my aunt will not allow another minute to elapse before she sends someone to recall me to a sense of my supposed duty. So I fasten on my hat as I am running down to the toolhouse, and I postpone the buttoning-on of my gaiters until I have made my escape.

The road upon which I travel is in an opposite direction to that which has been taken by the picnic party. But it is just as good a cycling road, and it does not take me long to reach the cottage of poor, old, bedridden Mrs. Heyes, whom it always does me good to come to see, for in spite of her many afflictions, she has a spirit which persists in looking smilingly upon all the world.

"Well, now, I do call this kind!" she says, the tears of gratitude actually shining in her still, pretty grey eyes. "To think that anybody should take the trouble to come five miles with a basket of strawberries for a poor, useless, old thing like me!"

"There is one thing," I reply heartily. "Nobody could possibly do too much for you, for you deserve whatever you get, and a good deal more. But there is nothing very kind in bringing you a few strawberries, considering what a lot we have in the garden. And as for the journey, why, five miles is nothing on a bicycle."

"That is just what Dr. Denham says," observes Mrs. Heyes, or, as she prefers to be called, "Old Margit." "He comes over here reg'lar to inquire after me, and I do believe he is going to cure my rheumatism, for the stuff he brings me does it such a wonderful lot of good."

"Dr. Denham?" I inquire curiously. "Who is he? I didn't know there was a doctor of that name in the neighbourhood."

"Neither there is. At least, not a reg'lar doctor. He is staying near Holbeck Sands with some friends, and he talks of leaving the neighbourhood before long. Something happened to his bicycle one day when he was passing here, and it had to be mended somehow. One of the indiarubber wheels wouldn't work at all, because it had gone flat instead of being round, so he asked Sarah for a pail and some water."

"How often does he come?" I ask, feeling considerable interest in a man who can be thus practically grateful for a little service rendered to him.

"Every day, miss," I am told. "Indeed, it isn't far off his time now, and I should like you to see him, if you will only stay a bit longer."

While Old Margit and I have been talking, Sarah, her orphaned granddaughter, has been preparing tea, and as everything here is scrupulously clean, it has struck me that it will be rather pleasant to share the meal with them. But the suggestion that I shall stay a little longer simply for the purpose of making the acquaintance of the good-natured doctor, is quite enough to stimulate my pride, and I am just protesting that I must go home at once, when the tinkling of a bicycle bell is heard, and a cheery voice at the door exclaims:

"Now then, Mrs. Heyes, how are we to-day? Is the tea ready? I am just dying for mine! Oh! I beg your pardon. You have a visitor, I see. Don't let me interrupt you."

The speaker, a good-looking man of about thirty, would have withdrawn at once, had not Old Margit eagerly called to him to come in.

"Tea is just about ready," she says, "and you'll find it nicer than usual, Doctor, for there are some beautiful strawberries to eat, and a pretty young lady to talk to."

"That is pleasant information," he says cheerily. "I am fond of strawberries, and I shall be very glad of a nice young lady to talk to. So I hope your friend doesn't mean to run away directly I get here."

Although I know very well that this man with the handsome presence and deep, rich voice, cannot possibly admit any claims to beauty on my part I note resentfully that he does not echo Old Margit's opinion that I am pretty, but substitutes the much more milder term "nice," which can be applied equally well to a good-natured scarecrow or a custard.

"But I won't feed his vanity by letting him think that he is of sufficien importance to scare me away," I tell myself. "And if he finds my nose too severe an ordeal to contemplate, *he* can go off."

But, somehow, more amicable thoughts soon prevail, and very much to my own astonishment I presently find myself chatting away with as much ease and merriment as though Dr. Denham and I had been friends for months.

"Thank you very kindly, miss," says Old Margit when I at last rise to leave. "I hope we shall be seeing you again soon."

"Yes," I answered promptly, "I will come on Monday

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or Tuesday if I can, and bring you a few more strawberries to make up for those I have eaten myself."

As I say this, I glance swiftly at the Doctor's face to see whether he feels interested in the arrangement or not, and I feel the soft colour rising to my cheeks again at sight of the unmistakable pleasure which my new acquaintance is showing.

"What a lucky thing!" he exclaims cordially." I want to consult you about something very particular, and I shall be here both on Monday and Tuesday! So if you arrive before me, please do me the favour of remaining until I come."

"How important!" I laugh. "Just fancy having business to consult *me* about, when you have only known me about an hour. I am afraid I must venture to doubt that statement, for nobody ever does consult me about business, not even the people who have known me all their lives."

"That is where the difference comes in," he retorts. "A new acquaintance may have a much truer eye to business than the people who have watched you grow up, and who imagine you to be still a child."

Still a child.

Aunt Hagar still thinks me a child, I know, and although Millie and I are of the same age, my cousin imagines me to be years her inferior in wisdom. Indeed, it has never struck me until this moment that I have a right to consider myself grown-up. But now that the idea has once been put into my head, it is never likely to leave it again, and even now there is a certain little god called Cupid, who, unknown to myself, is helping me to cross the border which divides childhood and womanhood, and is transforming the whole world for me.

It was a wilful childish creature who played truant with a basket of strawberries intended for Aunt Hagar's use. But it is quite a womanly person who returns to Brookside somewhat later in the day.

It takes me much longer to ride home than it did to reach Old Margit's cottage. But Dr. Denham is to blame for that, for he insists upon seeing me safely to the outskirts of our village, although I know very well that there is not the slightest necessity for him to do anything of the sort. Yet I like his presence all the same, and there are so many objects of interest to look at by the way, that the time passes all too quickly.

"Good-bye, Doctor."

"Good-bye, Miss ——. Well, it is odd, isn't it, that I have never heard your name yet?"

Dr. Denham is evidently expecting me to remove his ignorance concerning my actual identity. But instead of doing so I send my pedals spinning round with augmented speed, and am soon riding boldly up the carriage drive to Brookside, in full view of my indignant aunt, who positively glares at me through the middle pane of the drawing-room window.

CHAPTER II.

An Unrepentant Sinner.

I knew very well that I should get a tremendous scolding. But I had yet to learn the full length of vituperation to which my aunt could go, and it is lucky for my self-respect that I know that more than half the things she says about me are rank falsehoods.

I really think Aunt Hagar was never so much astonished in all her life as she is at my merriment, which refuses to be controlled, although I do my best to keep it in subjection.

"You wicked girl!" she exclaims. "You have insulted me, and made me look ridiculous in the eyes of my most important friends. And now, instead of feeling sorry for what you have done, you actually dare to laugh in my face! But I will have a full account of to-day's doings. Did you gather the strawberries I sent you for?"

"Yes, auntie," I answered sweetly.

"What have you done with them?"

"I have eaten them."

"What! A whole basketful?"

"No, only part of them. My friends ate the rest."

"And who are these friends of yours?"

"Very nice people indeed."

"I think I shall be the best judge of that. What are their names?"

"Oh! It doesn't matter about their names, auntie. They are my friends and you cannot possibly feel the least bit of interest in them."

This certainly is open rebellion, and I am quite astonished at my own daring.

Aunt Hagar tries threats and entreaties in turn. But neither of them move me from the position which I have taken up.

While the warfare is still pending, Millie returns from the picnic, with her face still radiant with enjoyment.

"I have had such a beautiful time, auntie!" she exclaims. "The Singletons had ordered a splendid tea, and we have arranged for another ride on Tuesday. But what is the matter? Has that horrid girl been doing something to vex you again?"

"Something to vex me, my darling!" cries Aunt Hagar tragically. "If it were mere vexation, I could endure it! But the ungrateful creature is doing her best to drive me distracted."

"Hateful thing!" responds Millie, casting a venomous look at me, which I return with one of lofty scorn, as I pass out of the apartment with all the dignity I can muster, while I tell myself that I do not care the least bit for their ill-nature.

I am intending to pass the evening in my own room. But this programme does not meet with Aunt Hagar's approval, and dinner is no sooner over than she finds me as much mending to do as would suffice for three or four afternoons.

Millie is allowed to amuse herself with a book, or some music, or in any way she likes. But then, you see, she has been a good girl. She has been to Carisvale in the company of a lot of nice people, with the full consent and knowledge of her guardian, while I have been playing truant in the company of people who must, say my relatives, be very disreputable beings indeed, since I dare not even mention their names.

Seeing how unavailing are either taunts or threats, Millie, whose curiosity has been aroused, tries to satisfy it by worming herself into my confidence.

It is Saturday night, and Aunt Hagar has fallen asleep in her armchair. There is, therefore, an opportunity for a little hypocritical pretence on Millie's part, so she slides her chair a little closer up to mine, and whispers amiably:

"I am not surprised, dear, that you were vexed at being kept in this afternoon, for it must have been a horrid disappointment to you. I tried all I could to persuade Auntie to let you come with us. But she said

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that she wanted you particularly, and Edgar Courtney called her a detestable old cat when I told him how awkward she had been."

"Yes," I respond, whispering quite as sweetly as Millie herself is doing. "I happened to be at my bedroom window as you were going away, and I heard you tell him. I also heard you reprove him for calling my nose hideous."

As I say this I look smilingly into the treacherous face beside me, and I have the satisfaction of seeing that even Millie Vernon's effrontery is not proof against the veiled challenge of her truthfulness. Her face actually reddened with confusion, and she bites her lips angrily, ere she recovers sufficient presence of mind to try and deceive me again.

Nor do I pay the slightest heed to the angry recalling voice behind me.

"But that was just when we were starting," she says. "It was afterwards that I explained everything to him, and he will very probably ask Aunt Hagar himself to let you come with us on Tuesday."

"Thank you," I retort scornfully, not caring whether my aunt hears me or not. "I have no desire to go with you on Tuesday. I daresay I shall be able to survive, even if I have to do without bicycle picnics for the rest of my days."

"You are cross because you have not been enjoying yourself, so I will forgive you any little injustice towards me. I hope you have not had any unpleasant experiences to-day besides those you have had at home."

"Oh, no!" I respond coolly. "My experiences have been very pleasant indeed."

"You might tell me whom you have been to see!"

"I never said that I had been to see anybody."

"But you have seen someone, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes; lots of people! I saw Farmer Ingledew going away from the 'Barley Mow' as I passed, and he looked as if he had been staying there longer than was good for him, for he wobbled about awfully."

"Lady Mary Ann, you are a perfect idiot! And I have no patience to talk any longer to you."

As Millie says this, she jumps to her feet in a violent temper, and Aunt Hagar's nap comes to an abrupt close at the same moment.

If I am not actually an idiot, there must really be something unusual the matter with me this evening, for I don't feel the least bit vexed at the compliments which are showered upon me. I have discovered a great thing. I have hitherto been too meek and yielding, and the bitter tears which have often been forced from me by gross injustice and ill-nature have only been giving more encouragement for petty tyranny.

If, on the other hand, I can but maintain my studied attitude of scornful indifference, my tormentors will become tired of tormenting me, and their ill-nature will recoil on their own heads.

Aunt Hagar sits bolt upright in her chair, and inquires plaintively what that dreadful girl has been doing now.

"There are two dreadful girls in the room," is my cool response.

"Which of them do you mean?"

Now if Miss Hagar Winterson had been gifted with justice or discrimination, it surely would not be difficult for her to answer my last question, for Millie fairly screams with spiteful rage, and, snatching up Aunt Hagar's prayer-book, she would have hit my head with it if I had not cleverly dodged it.

"You see," I continued airily, "she really is in a dreadful state. You had better give her something to cure her."

Then, feeling that I have been victorious all along the line, I leave my two amiable relatives to consult with each other as to the best means of reducing me to proper subjection again.

When I get back to my own room, it seems to me that the only wise plan to adopt is to go to bed at once, although I know that in all probability Aunt Hagar will send for me in a few minutes' time to go back to the drawing-room to do penance for wickedness. So I locked my bedroom door to keep out all intruders and firmly refused to open it when it is rapped at in about twelve minutes.

The next morning is Sunday, and my aunt, sending

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word that she does not feel well, has breakfast in her own room.

"It's your fault," says Millie vindictively, as she appropriates the muffin which I have had toasted for my own special benefit. "She's thoroughly upset by the disgraceful way you behaved yesterday, and if she has a serious illness you will have to answer for it."

"That won't trouble me," I replied airily. "I only hope the illness will be serious enough to make her remain in her room and that you will be compelled to keep her company."

Of course, I should be very sorry indeed if my aunt were really ill. But I see that it is to my advantage to continue my present line of conduct, and Millie is so astonished that she has not the courage to utter any more impertinences to me.

The sense of victory has an exhilarating effect upon me, for I enjoy my breakfast immensely, and I eat bread and butter to my boiled egg as heartily as I should have eaten the misappropriated muffin.

While I am in church I do try to feel more amiable towards my relatives, and I am partially successful until I get home again, and find Aunt Hagar ready with another lecture for me, however. I manage to curb my own temper, and do the best thing I can do under the circumstances.

I quit my aunt's presence, and leave her to talk to thin air if she likes. Had it been a week-day, she would have contrived to fill my time with work. Being Sunday she is not able to do this, and it is possible that she is trusting to the softening effect of my own meditations.

The arbour, which I have already mentioned, is a very favourite resort of mine, especially on calm sunny afternoons like the present, and I quietly make my way thither, hoping that Aunt Hagar will believe me to be still in my own room, for I want to think, and I don't want to have my thoughts disturbed.

I spent quite an hour in this peaceful solitude, and I carry out my intentions to the letter, for I am thinking busily all the time, and mostly of Dr. Denham.

I am still thinking of him when I hear footsteps approaching, and two well-known voices tell me that my present conduct is being discussed rather disparagingly.

"I have a good mind to repudiate all control over her," is the plaintive utterance of Aunt Hagar. "It is too bad that I should be saddled with the care of a girl who doesn't know how to treat me with common gratitude."

"I certainly would do so if I were you," urges my affectionate cousin Millie. "Why don't you send her away at once!"

"Because I know my duty, if she doesn't," answers my guardian. "And although I see nothing but trouble before me, I will go through with my task to the bitter end."

Perhaps, in this connection, it may be just as well to mention that until I am of age my aunt draws the whole of my income, and that my departure from her roof will make a difference of five hundred a year to her. It will, therefore, be easily understood why she is willing to martyrise herself by pursuing her guardianship "to the bitter end."

There is a slight pause, and as the speakers have come to a halt close to the arbour in which I am sitting, I don't need to strain my ears to catch every word they say, for nothing but a tangle of trailing honeysuckle separates us from each other, and hides us from each other's view.

Presently Millie returns to the attack.

"Do you know," she says slowly, "Lady Mary Ann has made some new acquaintances? I am quite sure of it, for she is far too stupid to have acted like she did yesterday, without having been put up to it."

"But whom can she have met?"

"That I do not know. But I can tell that it is someone whom she likes very well, and that she means to go and see them again on Tuesday."

"How have you discovered that?"

"Easily. You know how anxious she has always been to intrude herself upon us every time my friends and I have arranged a bicycle picnic? Yet when I asked her yesterday to go with us on Tuesday, she insolently informed me that she would be very sorry to go. Of course this change of conduct on her part can have only one meaning. She intends to go somewhere else on Tuesday, and if you don't want her to trample your authority under foot altogether, I should advise you to do something that will prevent her carrying out her intention."

"I say, Aunt Hagar!" I call out, purposely pitching my voice as if I were speaking to someone twelve yards away. "Don't you take Millie Vernon's advice, or she will lead you into mischief."

Both Aunt Hagar and Millie gave a startled jump, for they had not imagined me to be within hearing, and as I deliberately pass them on my way to the house, I cannot help smiling at their confusion.

CHAPTER III.

EQUAL TO THE EMERGENCY.

THE rest of Sunday, the whole of Monday, and part of Tuesday pass by in a similar manner to those already recorded, and I am looking forward with great glee to the prospect of my afternoon's excursion to Millington.

Of course I have said nothing about my projected visit either to my aunt or to my cousin, for I know quite well that as soon as ever they learn of my acquaintanceship with Dr. Denham, they will make it their business to prejudice him against me, and I have no intention to afford them an opportunity of doing so. Neither has my aunt given any sign that she knows that I mean to go out this afternoon. Such a possibility has not been alluded to except by Millie, who, knowing full well what my answer will be, has inquired politely if I would not care to join the bicycle party.

"It is not too late to alter your mind yet," she says. "You have cleaned your bicycle beautifully, and it looks quite a picture."

As she has foreseen, I elect to stay behind. But she has infused such an air of sincerity into her invitation that I cannot be anything but polite in my refusal, and the casual observer would have imagined her and me to be on mutually affectionate terms, as we bid each other good afternoon.

"Have you finished marking those pillow slips?" inquires Aunt Hagar.

"Yes, auntie," I reply. "I will fetch them down. Is there nothing else you would like me to do for you? Shall I mark that dozen of new towels?"

I have only half-an-hour at the outside before I start for Millington, and I know very well that I cannot

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mark a dozen towels in that time. But I can easily finish my task after I get home, and it is very amusing to see the look of relief on Aunt Hagar's face, as she hands me the work which she imagines will keep me indoors for the whole of the day.

But as soon as I reach my own quarters I pitch the towels on to my bed with scant ceremony, and hastily prepare for my intended excursion.

The basket and its contents are still where I put them. But a very casual glance tells me that something has happened to my bicycle since I finished cleaning it, just before lunch, for the back tyre is as flat as a pancake, and it will have to be mended before it can be mounted again.

Now I left that tyre positively rigid, and I know quite well that it cannot have become deflated without help. It is also quite easy for me to guess who is the author of the mischief, and I can understand now why Millie was so amiable a while ago.

She has wilfully punctured my tyre. And she thinks that she has effectually prevented me from making any surreptitious excursions this afternoon. Millie has herself had two punctures since she bought her machine, and she has had to send for a man from the bicycle shop to repair the damage. Very likely she thinks that I am as helpless as she is.

But I know too much about punctures to let this frustrate my plans. Having patched my tyre, I say, "Bravo! Mollie. You have circumvented them this time, my girl." exultantly to myself while I am using the pump with a verve which shows how strong and vigorous I am.

But I keep on pumping for a long time without any material effect, until it at last dawns upon me that the puncture I have repaired is not the only one I have to deal with, for I find that there are at least half-a-dozen more.

When I am reduced to my last patch my anxiety has become so painful that I believe I shall scream with rage if I am foiled again.

Hurrah! Things seem to be going all right this time! And when, after more than an hour's patient labour, I screw the valve-cover on, my elation is as great as my anxiety has been, for the tyre is as hard as nails, and my malicious cousin is outwitted after all.

But stay, am I certain of this? Or do I hear Aunt Hagar's voice telling Evans to fetch her a wrap, so that she can come into the garden for a stroll.

"And ask Miss Miggs to come downstairs at once," she concludes, so I know that I have only a couple of minutes' grace before I am discovered, and I forthwith make frantic haste with my task, for I want to slip out through the back-garden gate before my aunt and her wrath descend upon me.

"Lady Mary Ann," calls out my Aunt. "What are you doing here? Why are you not at work in your room?"

"Because," I reply, with outward calmness, though my heart is going pit-a-pat all the time, "because I do not want to be in my room working, and because I see no necessity for doing it, so long as I have plenty of money to keep myself without working."

"Well, if this isn't disgraceful! Lady Mary Ann, I do believe you are g ing mad!"

"And I believe you are quite right, Aunt Hagar! I have been awfully mad this last hour and more, ever since I discovered that your niece Millie had deliberately punctured my back tyre in six places, and you can tell her from me that if ever she dares to touch my machine again, I will smash hers into a thousand pieces."

"You atrocious girl! How dare you say such wicked things? Go back to your room this minute, and stay there until you are in a better frame of mind."

I calmly continue my walk in the direction of the gate. It is so evidently my intention to be disobedient that my adversary can no longer blind herself to the fact, and she darts forward, having determined to intercept me.

She is, however, just too late, for before she can reach me I have opened the gate, swung on to my machine, and have at last fairly started on the ride which has been so exasperatingly delayed.

Nor do I pay the slightest heed to the angry recalling voice behind me, but speed on my way with all the more ardour, because of the many hindrances which I have successfully surmounted.

CHAPTER IV.

Maliciously Misunderstood.

I do not pay much attention to the villagers whom I meet by the way, but I have plenty of interest to spare for a cyclist whom I meet after I have ridden another mile. I recognise him at once as the good-natured doctor, over whose virtues Old Margit is so enthusiastic.

Just for a moment some of Aunt Hagar's restrictions on matters of etiquette recur frowningly to my memory, and I wonder if it is quite proper for me to acknowledge an acquaintanceship which has begun so unceremoniously.

But Dr. Denham himself has no doubts on this score, for he comes up to me as if we were old friends, and greets me with a solicitous freedom from restraint which is very soothing to a girl whose daily life is one round of harshness and fault-finding.

"So you have come at last!" he exclaims. "I begun to be afraid that I should not see you to-day, and I felt immensely relieved when I spied you in the distance."

The doctor's frank manner dispels any inclination to stiffness on my part, and I showed myself as unaffectedly pleased at the meeting as he is.

"Old Margit has been expecting you for an hour or more," he remarks. "But singular to relate, she does not even seem to know your name. She just speaks of you as 'The pretty young lady from Crayburn,' and she tells me wonderful tales of your kindness towards her."

"Old Margit," I replied hastily, "is a dear old soul, who has the pleasant knack of magnifying any little favour done to her, and I really do not deserve all the praise she gives me. But I think I shall have to make the pacing, doctor, or we shall never reach Millington before dark."

I notice that my companion seems inclined to ride very slowly now, and I am anxious to put off as long as possible that declaration of my identity, which I always find so humiliating. But, although the doctor makes no objection to a quicker pace, he does not intend his curiosity to be baulked, and within a few minutes he observes:

"That is a lovely machine you have got Miss ——? Now, really, what do you call yourself?"

"Well, since you must know," I reply, preparing myself to submit to the inevitable smile of amusement which always appears on the faces of people when first

Read the next footline backwards.

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they hear my ridiculous name. "I call myself Molly."

"And a very pretty name, too. Nothing could be nicer. But, of course, there is a sequel to it?"

"Oh, yes, there's a sequel to it. And the sequel is Miggs! Molly Miggs! Miss Miggs! There, now, don't you feel much impressed by it?"

I feel very angry as I ask this question, for although I have hoped that the handsome doctor would be different to other people, the fatal smile appears on his face, just as it has always done on others, and I verily believe that I should use my riding whip rather viciously upon my unfortunate steed if I were riding a horse instead of a bicycle. As it is, I relieve my feelings by some furious pedalling, and for a few minutes I fairly seem to fly along the road. But my companion's speed is quite equal to mine, and as soon as I begin to slow down again, I am greeted by the laughing remark:

"Look here, young lady, it is no use trying to run away from me, for I have a very important protest to make. Your name doesn't fit you at all, and I don't intend to call you Miss Miggs. You look more like a young princess than a Miggs, so I shall cut the Gordian knot by calling you 'Molly!'"

"Oh! but you mustn't do that! It would be far too familiar, for this is only the second time we have met. Besides, nobody ever calls me Molly, except myself."

"Why, what do your people call you?"

"My people? I have no people, except an aunt and a cousin, and they invariably address me as 'Lady Mary Ann.'"

"Then I have the honour of talking to a titled lady?"

"I am sorry to contradict you. But I can only lay claim to 'Mary Ann.'"

The doctor's manner is altogether so kind and brotherly, that it really pleases me to let him have his own way, and by the time we reach Old Margit's cottage a casual observer would have supposed us to be friends of long standing.

As on Saturday we eat our share of the strawberries which I have brought for Old Margit and Sarah, and this circumstance seems to demand the promise of another visit from me.

The minutes seem fairly to fly. Yet I am not at all sorry when the time for departure comes, for I know quite well that I shall have a pleasant escort. I know also, though no words have been exchanged to that effect, that neither he nor I intend to take the nearest route to Brookside, for we are both very particular to see that our lamps are in perfect order.

Within a mile of the village I insist upon bidding Dr. Denham good-night.

"It has been very difficult for me to get out to-day," I say, "and there will be no end of a storm when I get home, for I don't think I have ever been out so late before, except in company with Aunt Hagar. But things will be a great deal worse if it is suspected that I have not been alone, and as I don't want to be prevented from coming out altogether, I will say good-night now."

"Good-night, Molly," is the reply. "I would not for the world augment your troubles. But there is no reason why I should not follow at a reasonable distance until you are nearly at home again, and you must not forget to come to Old Margit's on Thursday, for I really have immensely important business with you."

"You said that before," I laugh, "and then you talk nothing but frivolity, after all."

I expect to go through a tolerably severe ordeal when I get home. Nor are my expectations at all disappointed. Aunt Hagar was furious when I left her, and her fury is now all the greater because she has had to bottle it up for five mortal hours.

She is so violent, so unjust, and so untruthful, that my heart hardens into instant rebellion again, and her accusations are so out of proportion to my delinquencies, that instead of being humiliated to the dust by them as she intends me to be, they fill me with nothing but lofty scorn.

Millie has been at home two hours, and she makes full use of the occasion by uttering mean insinuations which have, however, quite lost their power to sting, for I am in such a state of exultation that I am practically impervious to them.

I do not wait to argue, but go up to my own room, and although it is so late, I don't go to bed until I have conscientiously marked all the towels which were given to me to do this afternoon.

CHAPTER V.

The Dawn of Happiness.

Three or four days pass by, and I am so jealously watched that it has been utterly impossible for me to pay an afternoon visit to Millington. But the time has not been uneventful, for the Fates seem to be conspiring against me, and whether I do a thing or whether I leave it undone it is all the same; I am continually in hot water from morning till night.

I rise in good time, resolved to do all in my power to soften the harshness of the atmosphere in which I live, and I use every effort to show that I am anxious to be on good terms with my relatives if they will only treat me fairly. But all my good intentions are wasted, and now that Aunt Hagar has once got it into her head that there is something wrong with mine, she is constantly making discoveries, which she and Millie twist in confirmation of this terrible theory.

"There is nothing mad about me," I tell myself, "but there soon will be, if this wrangling and mischief-making continue much longer. I did not believe it possible that anybody could be so blindly unjust as Aunt Hagar is to me, and I cannot conceive why Millie should cherish such furious anger against me."

It transpires afterwards that jealousy has something to answer for in this connection, and that greed is also playing some queer tricks with my cousin's imagination. I have no means at present of knowing that she has had

THE
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a look at my grandfather's will, and that she has found out that if the old gentleman had died one month sooner than he did, he would not have written the codicil in which he divided between her and me the money which was originally intended to go to her alone.

My mother had the misfortune to displease her father by her marriage, which was certainly not a very judicious one, and it has struck Millie that if her grandfather had not repented of the harshness which he had maintained up to a few weeks before his death, she would have had the money which is mine now, as well as that which she already enjoys.

It is a fact, therefore, that she resents my very existence. But I am unaware of this as I wonder why she hates me so, and I think no girl was ever more thoroughly miserable than I am until I again find an opportunity of making my escape from Brookside.

To use my bicycle is out of the question, for Aunt Hagar has locked it in her dressing-room, and she has informed me that it will remain there until I comport myself entirely in harmony with her wishes. There is small hope of my being able to do this as long as all my words and actions are wilfully misconstrued, so I resolve to be independent of the bicycle and watch for a chance of going out unobserved.

All I need is ten minutes start to enable me to get clear of the village, and my opportunity comes in due course.

The gardener, who works for us three days a week, forgets to lock the back gate when he goes out, and while my relatives are engaged in the drawing-room with some visitors, I am speeding as fast as I can on foot towards Millington, wondering the while what important changes have been taking place since I was last there. In reality, only a few days have intervened. But it seems a long time to me, and I feel relieved from a fear of I know not what, when a turn in the road shows me a figure which is spinning right merrily towards me on a bicycle, and which I recognise as that of Dr. Denham.

"I had made up my mind that something had happened to you," he says, and my heart positively leaps with joy when I see the genuine gladness which shines in his face at sight of me. "I have haunted this road ever since I last saw you, and I really meant to brave the lion in his den and make inquiries for you, if you didn't turn up this afternoon. But why are you not on your machine?"

"Because," I reply gaily, feeling that the bliss of the present moment is worth all the unhappiness I have been enduring of late, "because my steed is locked in his stable, and I am not allowed to use him."

> "Her father he has locked the door,
> Her mother keeps the key,
> But nothing in this world shall part
> My own true love from me!"

sings my companion, in a rich, sonorous voice, and even while the scarlet flush comes to my cheeks, I feel myself irresistibly carried away by the natural buoyancy of my spirits, and I join with ebullient abandon in the refrain of the time-worn glee, which has suddenly acquired for me such a joyous meaning, as it never has had before.

"And now, little one," says the doctor soberly, "just tell me all your troubles. I don't want to be intrusive, but it is often pleasant to have a sympathiser, and I would give the world to make your life happy."

Dr. Denham and I are so thoroughly congenial that it seems to be quite natural for our friendship to progress rapidly, but I cannot help feeling a little startled, for the tone which he has now adopted is not merely that of a friend, but of a lover, and the joy which this conviction brings to me is turned momentarily into keen pain by the fear that my idol may only be playing with me.

But I have only to look into his handsome face again to be convinced that he is the soul of honour, and it is truly so comforting to have someone to whom I can tell my sorrows that I am soon pouring forth the tale of my recent experiences.

But the tenour of one or two of the doctor's subsequent remarks serve to show me that he is making a very curious mistake concerning me. I have made no allusion to my fortune, and he has taken it into his head that I am a penniless dependent upon the bounty of the aunt who is so unkind towards me. Swift as thought there comes to me the reflection that the surest test of severity which I can exact from my new friend is to allow him to believe that I am really as poor as he supposes me to be, and I withhold the little item of information which will help to assure me that if this man is really learning to love me, his love for me must be as pure and unselfish as the love for him which has so suddenly sprung up in my own heart.

All the time we have been talking, we have been continuing on our way to Old Margit's, he wheeling his machine with one hand, while I feel so happy and elated that the distance we travel seems all too short for me.

"I cannot bear to part from you," he says tenderly, "or I would say that it will tire you too much to walk all the way to Old Margit's cottage."

"Pray, don't think of that!" I protest. "You don't know how strong I am, and I feel just now as if I could walk twenty miles."

"With me for your companion?"

"Of course. It would be too far to go alone, wouldn't it?"

"Indeed it would. Molly, my darling, do you think you could go all through life in company with me?"

But this question, though I would fain answer it in the affirmative, suddenly brings me face to face with what has always been one of my greatest troubles. For one moment my blood pulses through my veins with delirious joy, and then I turn cold and pale with the conviction that such happiness as is here foreshadowed cannot be intended for me.

"How can it be possible," I ask myself, "that anybody can overlook my unfortunate disfigurement to such an extent as to actually fall in love with me?" And the doubt clamours so persistently for utterance, that it shapes itself into words.

"You cannot," I stammer, feeling greater pity for myself than ever I have done in my life before. "You cannot like me enough for that. You forget how ugly I am!"

"My darling," is the enthusiastic response, "to me you are almost perfection. Your figure is positively queenly, your hair, your complexion, and everything else about you is beautiful, except——"

"Except my nose!" I interrupt passionately. "Even you cannot say that my nose isn't hideous," and I forthwith burst into tears of bitter humiliation, for it seems to me that all my earthly happiness is

Finest Serial ever written, "The Golden Dwarf."

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dependent on the shape of the most prominent feature of my face.

But Dr. Denham proves to be a very good consoler, and he enters into a long discussion concerning our future prospects, wherein it transpires that he is quite a grand individual.

"I didn't suppose my position would interest you before," he concludes triumphantly. "But now that you have promised to become my wife——"

"But I haven't promised!" I interrupt once more.

"But you will promise," he says confidently. "And there is no reason why I should not seal our compact this very moment."

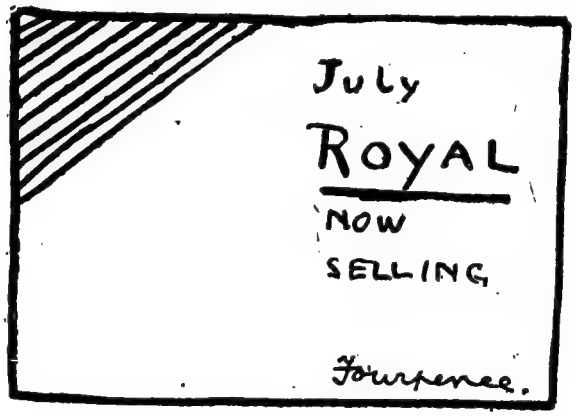
Do I want to utter any further protests?

I hardly know. But if I do, I have no time left to do it in, for a kingly head is bent swiftly down to mine, a warm kiss is impressed upon my lips, and I am informed joyously that I am pledged to become the wife of this man who has captured my heart so easily.

"And now," he continues, "you are not to forget that henceforth you are to treat me with less ceremony than you have hitherto done. My name is Gilbert, and you must call me by no other. You have been 'Molly' to me ever since the happy day on which I first saw you, and I want you to love me enough to be able to treat me as unceremoniously as I treat you."

I do not quite remember my exact answer to this question, but I do remember that Gilbert is greatly delighted with it, and that he insists upon going straight back with me to interview Aunt Hagar. I am rather nervous about the result of this interview. But my nervousness is entirely misplaced, for Gilbert possesses one means of winning my aunt's approval, which I have never suspected. Instead of being a poor, obscure doctor, he turns out to be Sir Gilbert Seymour, who is so wealthy that my own fortune henceforth serves only as a portion of my pin money.

He and I now live very happily together, and if I ever hear tell of the marriage of my cousin Millie, I will let you know about it. But at present there appear to be very slight prospects of such an event coming to pass, for her shrewish temper has alienated all her former admirers. Perhaps this is just as well, for Aunt Hagar and she are such congenial spirits that it would be a pity to part them, and I have heard incidentally that they often boast of being closely related to the handsome Lady Seymour, formerly nicknamed "Lady Mary Ann."



"Perhaps he isn't all he might be, but he stood by me in my hour of trial——" "What was he, an officer of the court?"

Barber: "Your 'air is gettin' rather thin, sir." Victim: "So is that remark." (Deep silence for the rest of the time.)

"Why does she consider her husband a model? He smokes and is fond of liquor?" "Yes." "Plays cards and scolds?" "So they say." "Never gets home until one?" "Yes; but——" "But what?" "He never makes a spot on the table-cloth when he carves."

"You were doing some rather loud talking to-day, Jack." "Well, I only stated facts." "Glad to hear it; when you were saying that you feared nothing that walked your wife was within ten feet of you." "Christopher Columbus! I hope she didn't hear me."

"Why do you scold the butcher?" asked the husband. "It isn't his fault that the meat comes to the table all dried up. Scold the cook." "I don't care to," replied the wife, "but I'm in hopes that if I keep on scolding the butcher he'll get mad and come round and scold the cook."

Stranger: "I was over at your court-house to-day at the murder trial. I don't see why the jury deliberates so long; the prisoner proved a complete *alibi*." Resident: "Wall, I wouldn't like to gamble on the result. This is the first chance for a hangin' since the new gaol's bin built, an' local pride's at stake."

At a café a group of gentlemen were discussing politics; a young student entered and joined in the conversation; his argument did not please the others and one of them said to him: "Be quiet! At your age I was an ass myself!" "You are wonderfully well preserved, sir," was the reply.

When a schoolmaster entered the temple of learning a few mornings ago, he read on the blackboard the touching legend, "Our teacher is a donkey." The pupils expected there would be a combined cyclone and earthquake, but the philosophic pedagogue contented himself with adding the word "driver" to the legend, and opened the school as usual.

One day a clergyman's wife, preparing to give a collation to her husband's association on the following Monday, and not being in the habit of doing extra work on Sunday, told her cook that she would better boil the ham for the sandwiches on Saturday, lest it boiled on Monday it would be too warm to slice. "Why," drawled the cook, "Miss W'ite, yer don't think it ud be wickid ter bile it on Sunday, do yer, ef we biled it slow?"

"Well," said the red-faced man, "the most exciting chase I ever had happened a few years ago in Russia. One night when I was sleighing I discovered, to my intense horror, that I was being followed by a pack of wolves. I fired blindly into the pack, killed one of the brutes, and, to my delight, saw the others devour it. After this, however, they still came on. I kept on repeating the dose, with the same results and each occasion gave me an opportunity to whip up my horses. Finally, there was one wolf left, yet on it came, with its fierce eyes glaring in anticipation of a good supper." "Why, man," said one of the listeners, by your way of reckoning that wolf must have had the rest of the pack inside it." "Ah," said he, "now as I remember it did bulge a bit."

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RECALLED.

A True Story of Venice.

All Venice was aghast at the outrage which had been committed by some unknown, sacrilegious hands; the body of the lovely Leonora, the wife of the powerful Seranzo, who had died from some strange, wasting disease, had been carried off from the mansion where it was lying in state, awaiting interment, and there was not the slightest trace of the robbers or any indication where the body had been taken.

Two hundred years ago, the good people of Venice were not easily startled; their city had from time to time been the scene of such awful deeds that they were wont to take the most extraordinary events as matters of course, but this strange robbery and mysterious spiriting away of a corpse touched them to a surprising degree.

The only person who seemed to be but little moved by the occurrence was Seranzo himself, at first the suspicion of those about him fell upon the husband, but this was dispelled by the hard fact that he could have no motive for such a deed. Their short married life had not been happy, he was even accused of causing her death by harsh treatment, if not by worse means, but in that case he would naturally be more content to see her in her grave.

In a few days the excitement cooled down and other stirring events effaced its memory from the minds of the Venetians. Seranzo joined once more in the gay life of the city and looked about for another partner.

Some thought—that is, those who did not know much about the matter—that Seranzo would seek the hand of Leonora's twin sister, Eliade, who so much resembled his late wife that it was often difficult for persons who only saw them occasionally to distinguish the one from the other. But had these worthy people been present at an interview between Eliade and her brother-in-law on the day following Leonora's death, they would have had all doubts set at rest.

The interview was brief, but stormy. Eliade violently reproached Seranzo for his cruelty, and was answered by the latter with insinuations against Leonora; as Eliade indignantly repudiated the charge, Seranzo took a letter from a drawer and threw it on the table near which she stood.

"Read that!" he cried sneeringly.

Eliade mechanically took up the letter and read it. The few lines of writing contained on that sheet were an impassioned declaration of admiration for her sister's beauty and scornful depreciation of the husband she had chosen. There was nothing in the letter to show that it was in reply to one from Leonora, or to prove in any way the accuracy of the charge; rather was it the

Eliade mechanically took up the letter and read it.

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You Can't Say

SILVER'S GOLDEN,

BUT YOU WILL SAY THAT

R. NORMAN SILVER'S

"Golden Dwarf"

NEXT WEEK IS A SPLENDID SERIAL.

unprovoked outburst of an unrecognised love, bestowed upon its object while that object was unconscious of having called it into existence. It bore no signature, but on the back were several bars of music which demonstated that the author of the letter was a musician of no mean order. Eliade, who was passionately devoted to music, almost forgot her indignation as her eye ran quickly over the notes; it was so exquisite, this work of the unknown lover, that her very soul was delighted. She was brought back to earth by an exclamation from Seranzo.

"Well?" he asked in the same sneering tone.

"I will keep this," she declared decisively. "It is the best proof I can have of your injustice to my sister!"

She left him without uttering a word more, and she never spoke to him again.

After the disappearance of the body, Eliade set herself the task of discovering whither it had been taken. She was determined to make that task the duty of her life, if need be, and to spare no trouble or expense. She connected the music at the back of the letter with the untoward occurrence, and in her search for the body she also sought for the musician, hoping that the discovery of the latter's identity might assist her in her work.

Several weeks passed without result; all Venice was now interested in the musical compositions of a man whose name was kept secret, but who was generally designated as the "mad musician," for reasons which no one could exactly define.

His compositions were so much above those of other musicians that the opinion was gradually formed that they must be the outcome of supernatural genius. Eliada went several times to hear these pieces in the hope that she might recognise the music on the back of the letter, but in vain.

One evening, musing sadly over her fruitless endeavours, Eliade heard music proceeding from a passing gondola; she listened attentively, and then sprang to her feet with a cry of mingled surprise and joy. She had heard the notes which had haunted her since her sister's death.

In a turmoil of excitement she ordered her gondola to be made ready, and was quickly being rowed in the direction which the other boat had taken. After a few minutes rowing, the gondola was brought within earshot of the music, and Eliade bade her gondolier to row steadily, but not quickly, as she wished to track the singer to his destination.

Alternately singing and playing, the occupant of the foremost gondola proceeded in the direction of a lonely island, scarcely ever visited by the people of Venice because it contained a crypt which was reputed to be haunted.

Eliade decided not to land that evening should the musician do so, but to wait till the following day when she could visit the spot unobserved and make an examination of the island—for what? She could not answer the question, she scarcely knew what she expected to find.

Her gondolier rested on his oars as they dimly discerned the other boat touch the shore of the little island, then the head of the gondola was turned and Eliade went back to her dwelling to wait impatiently for the morrow.

It was noon on the following day when Eliade landed, bidding her gondolier to await her return, and made straight for the crypt despite the uneasy feeling occasioned by a recollection of the popular belief. She entered with no little trepidation, and her heart gave a jump of fear when she found her way barred by the figure of an old woman.

"Why do you come to disturb the spirits of the dead?" asked the woman, staring at Eliade in surprise. A second later she retreated with a look of terror and gasped:

"Come back to life!"

Eliade was quick to grasp the meaning of these words.

"Where is she?" she demanded in a tone of authority.

"In there!" replied the woman, speaking as though under a spell. Then, recovering herself, she continued: "You are not she—she is dead. Who are you?"

"Her twin sister," responded Eliade. "Take me to her. Tell me what it all means."

The woman led the way into the crypt. On a marble block lay the embalmed body of Leonora, radiantly beautiful, like one in a peaceful slumber. Round this chamber were folios of music and three or four musical instruments, some chairs, candlesticks and other indications that it was sometimes occupied by the living as well as the dead. Eliade fell on her knees and wept, but she was not permitted to exhaust her grief; the woman touched her on the shoulder and spoke hurriedly.

"You must not stay here. If he comes, he will be furious. He is mad, he must be, or he could not play such music, he would not play to her. Yes, yes; I will tell you all about it; only come away!"

Eliade had risen and now followed the guardian of the dead to another chamber, or vault, in the crypt.

"He has told me all about it," began the woman. "He loved her, but she did not know it. He wrote to her on her wedding day; he saw her from time to time without revealing himself. When he heard of her death, he was wild with grief; he could not bear the thought; he believed that she was in a trance and would come back to life under his care—he felt that his music would recall her spirit to the motionless body. He had it brought here, where he imagined no one would venture, and he spends most of his time here, composing music.

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and playing it to her. I was his nurse and he can trust me. He will be here soon!"

"I must stay and see him! At least," she added, protestingly, as the woman shook her head, "I must watch and listen. You can hide me—you must!"

The old woman might have objected, but she had no time. A soft step made them both cease speaking, and the old woman hurried away to greet the musician. He had not heard their voices; for his mind was full of deeper things.

Eliade remained motionless for two or three minutes, and then ventured to the entrance of the other vault and peered in. A man stood near the marble block, his back turned to her, ready to play.

A moment later the place was filled with melody so grand, so expressive, that Eliade stood transfixed. She knew not how long she remained there, lifted to the skies by the soul-entrancing harmony. Suddenly it ceased, and the man spoke:

"Leonora, come back! No movement! The time is not yet at hand, but it will come. Your spirit cannot withstand the love which finds its expression in music and constant devotion. Come back and be mine!"

He partly turned, and Eliade saw the features of Bendetto Marcello, whose fame as a musician had extended far beyond Venice.

"Marcello!" she murmured under her breath. "And he is the 'mad musician' of whom every one is speaking. One man has earned two reputations! The world will wonder when it learns that Marcello and the mad musician are the same! And this grand music is composed for her! How happy should I be to gain the love which is bestowed on that figure!"

He threw down his instrument, and pressed forward.

A moment later her eyes lit up with a strange expression, and she fled from the crypt. She found the gondolier waiting with evident signs of impatience; in answer to her enquiries, he said he had seen no other gondola, from which she concluded that Marcello had approached the island from the other side and was unaware that his secret had been discovered.

Two days afterwards, a similar scene was being enacted in the crypt, but this time there was no second listener.

The elderly guardian stood where Eliade had listened on the former occasion, and, contrary to her custom, she betrayed signs of nervousness and anxiety. Marcello was pouring out his soul in celestial music, his eyes fixed on the still features of his beloved. It was afternoon; the candles were not lighted, and the faint light from outside illuminated the interior but dimly.

In the midst of his playing the hands of the musician trembled, for his eager days gaze had detected a quiver of the eyelids.

With bated breath he watched the figure that lay before him. Again that quiver of the eyelids, then a long drawn sigh and the eyes opened, fixing themselves with a wondering expression on Marcello.

"Recalled!" he shouted in a paroxysm of joy.

He threw down his instrument and pressed forward to take the hands of Leonora.

"Leonora, you have come back to me!" he cried in ecstacy, assisting her to rise and then kneeling before her in adoration. "Music has wrought a miracle, as I knew it would!"

But now the old nurse pressed forward, so excited

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that she could scarcely stand upright, and, gently withdrawing from Marcello's grasp the hand which he was reverently kissing, led the young woman into the next vault.

Marcello was beside himself with joy. He bestowed every attention upon his beloved, and played his exquisite compositions untiringly for her benefit, being rewarded to the full by her smile and prettily-worded thanks. It was paradise to him to spend his life in pleasing her.

Thus another two days passed, and then the young woman made a confession.

"You call me Leonora; you have bestowed your love on me; what does a name matter? Should I not do the same for you and you for me under any name?"

Marcello looked at her like one who does not comprehend, and does not care to comprehend mere trifles.

"I thought I loved you when your spirit had fled, but only during these two days have I really understood what love really is. What matters it how you are named?"

"I am Eliade. Leonora was my sister. I have taken her place. Is it not better so?"

They remained for a few moments with clasped hands, gazing at each other tenderly.

Gradually a different light, one of comprehension, came into his eyes and he folded her in his arms and kissed her.

The body of Leonora was reverently buried in the crypt, and Marcello returned to the world with his bride, with whom he passed the only happy years of his life. When he died, in 1739, his fame had extended all over Europe, and most musicians of the present day are acquainted with some, at least, of his compositions.

"And do you really think she is so old-fashioned, your Grace?" "Well—weally. Don't you know she has a Roman nose and a Greek profile?"

Jane: "My dear, there is crape on the Dobb's door. Someone must have died." Maud: "Impossible. I'm sure the doctor hasn't been there for weeks."

Clarence: "What are you at now, Willie?" Willie: "Aw, I'm simply a waitah, ye know." Clarence "Howwors! You're surely joking." Willie: "Not at all; I'm waiting for me uncle to die, deah boy. Have a violet?"

"What has become of old Uncle Billy, who used to be always suffering with the rheumatism?" asked the returned wanderer. "Why," said the old resident, "it all came about this way. There was a doctor come through the country and cured the old man." "Yes?" "And then, as he didn't have nothing to interest him no more, after his rheumatism was gone, the poor old man pined away and died."

A small provincial paper, referring to a man who had a reputation for a careless toilet, announced as follows: "Mr. Makeup will wash himself before he assumes the office of parish clerk." On reading this, Makeup was furious, and he demanded a retraction, which the paper made thus: "Mr. Makeup requests us to deny that he will wash himself before he assumes the office of parish clerk."

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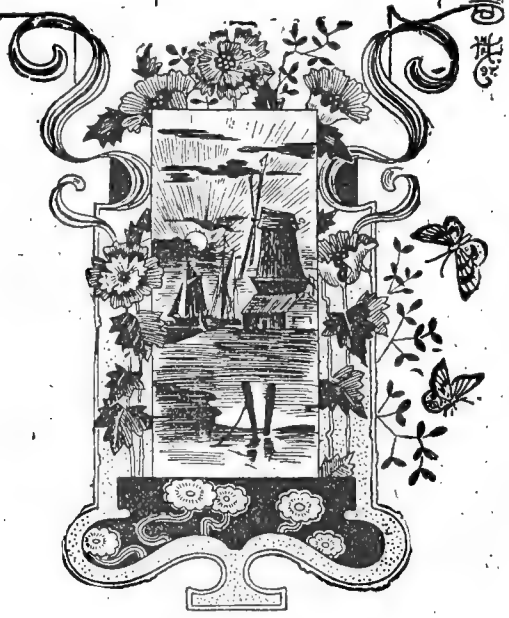
THE STORY OF MARJORY DARE.



THE pinky-white apple-blossom was falling in soft showers upon the pair under the tree in the old orchard.

The girl's head rested upon the broad shoulder of her companion, a tall, well-built young fellow of the working farmer class.

From the tearfulness in her voice as she every now and again responded to his low-whispered words, and from the caressing tenderness of his touch, as his hand lingeringly passed and re-passed over her hair, it was without doubt, a "good-bye" time; an evident "parting of the ways."

Personal descriptions (especially of women) are, as guides to character seldom satisfactory or very helpful, and Marjory Dare was by no means one of that sensationally beautiful type of women that lends itself so readily to word-picturing. Not plain exactly was she, but yet a more than ordinary fair example of the average attractive, healthy English girl. Such an one indeed, as may be met with any day on any country-side.

People said that John Arkwright was unusually love-blind; that Marjorie had another string to her bow.

A faint echo of this rumour had but lately reached him. John, however, with a true man's implicit faith in the woman to whom he had given himself heart and soul, would none of it. Still, the thing rankled a little, do what he might. A vague feeling of uneasiness troubled him now, when, on the eve of departure for Australia, to seek fortune (as he read it) at the fountain-source, he had come to the old trysting-place, not alone to bid farewell, but to assure himself by one more look into Marjorie's eyes that his fears were baseless as they were unworthy.

It must have been her repeated sweet acquiescence that at last appeared to vex him somewhat. It was too cloying, too "sweet i' the mouth."

"Marjorie!" he said, gently disengaging her head from his shoulder, and with his two hands holding her at arms' length. "Marjorie! That artist chap. I hear he's been in the neighbourhood lately."

She looked up quickly, her eyes (and they were her glory—large, dark, speaking almost) seeking in his face the extent of his knowledge.

"Oh! Mr. Beryl!" she at length replied, with a poor attempt at a laugh; then, seeing his surprised annoyance at her manner, "I don't know! I haven't seen him, and—I don't particularly wish to see him that I am aware of."

"I'm glad of that, dear!" said John, with an evident sigh of relief, "Very glad!"

"Why?"

"Oh! Well! he's not the sort of man I want you to know, or to be friends with."

The positiveness of this statement was, on the face of it, injudicious. It implied mastership, and the absolute right to dictate, and this before marriage is nearly always a dangerous experiment.

She drew herself away from his hands, and stood a moment picking to pieces a spray of blossom.

Then:

"I know who is at the bottom of this! Your sister has never liked me! What has Mr. Beryl to do with me, that you should let Ella's wicked insinuations prejudice you against me?"

"Nothing, Marjorie, of course!—I——"

"Then why!" she passionately interrupted him, "why insult me by the mean suggestion? But it is getting late. Good-night!"

"And is that all?" he said, earnestly reproachful. "Remember, I may not see you again for years, perhaps—perhaps—never! Haven't you a kind word, Marjorie, for me to take away with me?"

"It is you alone who are to blame," she replied coldly. "Good-night," and before he could answer, or realize even that she had gone, she had disappeared among the trees in the direction of the house.

* * * * *

It is two years since John Arkwright sailed for the "Underside," and it is on just such an evening as that which saw his parting with Marjorie Dare, and almost

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upon the same spot, that two people are standing in animated converse.

The girl we know, for in spite of change of expression, inclining to the recklessly defiant, she is the same Marjorie as of old.

The man is an artist, evidently; he has the outward and visible mark of the fraternity, which does not always include the inward and the spiritual.

Not bad looking, presumably in good circumstances, and more than a trifle supercilious he is certainly not so much in earnest as is his fair companion.

The tone of cheap and incessant *badinage* which he adopts towards her appears to displease her. Without doubt she wishes to take the matter, whatever it may be, between them seriously, but at every turn is met only with some playful phrase; some mere complimentary nothing.

He holds her hand; holds it so tightly, that, do as she will she cannot withdraw it.

"Mr. Beryl! Let go my hand, please!"

"Since when have you forgotten the name bestowed upon me by my respected god-parents?" he said, quite ignoring her request.

"I do not choose to remember it," replied Marjorie, hotly.

"No? I am unfortunate, Marjorie!"

"Mr. Beryl! You have no right to speak to me like this. It is my friends only who call me by my Christian name."

"And what am I, then?" he queried with a mischievous lifting of his brows. "Am I an enemy? Perhaps I am the Arch for—eh! I verily believe you are angry with me. It is a pity, for it spoils your eyes, my dear, it does indeed!"

Archie Beryl looks at her with an unpleasantly fixed gaze which somehow compels her to lift her eyes to his, by sheer force of fascination.

It is at this moment that Marjorie's father calls her from the house door. Wrenching her hand out of Beryl's grasp, and answering: "I'm coming, dad!" she quickly turns, and leaves the artist to his own reflections.

What follows is matter of County history, inasmuch as the account of it is to be found in the criminal records of ——shire.

Beryl left Farmer Dare's orchard by the stile which led into the home meadow. This he crossed, over to its west corner, where is another stile, separating the field from Brockley Wood.

It was quite dark now, or he would have perceived that he was not alone. As a matter of fact, a tall, broad shouldered man, wearing a dark semi-seafaring suit, and a large felt hat, slouched well down, so as to conceal his features, had from behind a neighbouring tree, both seen and heard all that was said and done at the interview between Marjorie and Beryl beneath the apple-tree.

Step-for-step with the latter, only keeping well in the shadow, moved the other.

At the second stile Beryl paused to light a cigar, and then settled himself down to the walk of about a quarter of a mile through the coppice out into the main road. He was quite familiar with the path, and was by no means fearful of interruption, or danger of any kind.

There is a small rivulet which runs through the wood, and which is spanned at the pathway point by a little wood bridge, a mere couple of planks thrown across without handrail or protection of any sort.

Immediately beyond the bridge, on the side furthest from Dare's farm, the stream widens out into a good sized pool, dangerously deep, and full of holes.

Beryl had crossed this bridge, humming a snatch of popular melody, and had reached terra firma when he heard distinctly, first the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps in the dead leaves on the other side of the stream, and then the heavier, louder tread upon the frail structure itself.

He turned sharply, and was instantly brought face to face with a stranger.

"Mr. Beryl, I believe?" said the latter in deep, constrained tones.

"This is not the place for such an enquiry," answered the other. "If you know me, and it seems that you do, I am to be found at the 'Brockley Arms' in the village. Good-night."

"It is here and now that you will listen to what I have to say," replied the man, reaching out his right arm and gripping Beryl firmly by the collar of his coat; with the movement placing himself directly in the artist's path.

"What do you mean, you scoundrel? Let go!"

"Not 'till I have done," answered the man, increasing the intensity of his grip. "I have sure information that you have on and off during this more than two years trifled with the affections of Marjorie Dare, knowing well that it is out of your power to marry her, you having a wife already. Is it true?"

"I refuse to answer; as my private affairs can be no possible business of yours."

"Is it true?"

"No!"

"Then God forgive you for as monstrous a liar as ever trod earth! Listen. It was quite by chance that a fellow-passenger with me from Sydney should be one Henry Martin, whose only sister you, Archibald Beryl, married four year's since. Do you deny it?"

Now, whether the men had during their altercation moved dangerously near to the bank of the stream; or whether Beryl, in his efforts to free himself from the other's hold, slipped on the greasy mixture of mud and wet grass, will never be satisfactorily explained, for the only man able to solve the mystery is himself in doubt.

Certain it is that when Beryl refused to reply to the questions so fiercely put to him, his accuser was compelled to wrench himself back so as to escape falling into the water.

He was only just in time, for Beryl, beside himself almost with rage and mortification, dealt his opponent a vigorous blow, which only failed in effect by reason of the other's retreating movement.

With a great cry, Beryl lunged forward down the bank into the water, and disappeared.

Hanging over the stream by the aid of a sapling growing out of the bank, and with his face close to the water, the other watched for any signs of Beryl coming to the surface.

Then a lantern-flash on the top of the opposite bank, and he heard voices demanding of him his name and business.

Keepers belonging to the Coombe Court Estate, which included Brockley wood, the newcomer's heard the man's story, and decided to let the local police settle the matter.

"You know me, of course?" said the suspect,

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throwing back his broad felt hat, while one of the keepers held up the lantern to his face.

"Why, it's young Awkwright! Mr. John, I'm main sorry; both of us is, but for our own protection we must ask you to come with us into Brockley."

"Why, certainly! but can nothing more be done to try and find this wretched man's body?"

"Depend upon it it's jammed in a hole. There's nothing for it but to wait till daylight to make a search for it."

* * * * *

John Arkwright, committed to the County Assizes for the wilful murder of Archibald Beryl, in due course stands his trial in Brockley town.

He has admitted that he deliberately planned to follow and accost the artist on the night in question. This admission makes a fatal impression upon the Court, the judge especially pointing out in his address to the jury that the prisoner had every probable motive to commit the crime with which he stood indicted, in that he had himself had love passages with the young woman whose name had been mentioned in the course of the proceedings. Jealousy, therefore, to his (the judge's) mind, furnished the only key to whatever mystery there might be about the affair.

That Archibald Beryl was knowingly a married man did not in any way affect the issue, and it was clear that the quarrel between the two men must, upon the prisoner's own showing, have originated with himself.

The strongly adverse summing-up of the judge led most in court to look upon a verdict of "Guilty" as almost a foregone conclusion. True, the prisoner's counsel, the most eminent of "Old Bailey" pleaders, had commented strongly upon three principal facts.

In the first place he argued that the evidence against his client was wholly circumstantial; secondly, that John Arkwright had frankly told his story, in no way withholding anything, even to his own detriment; and lastly, that during his whole life the prisoner had, not alone by those of his own immediate neighbourhood, but by the whole county, been respected, loved even, as witness the overwhelming testimony of rich and poor, peer and peasant.

When, after the judge's address, the jury declined to leave the box, as being unnecessary, but stood up at once, just whispering together for barely a minute, no one, from his lordship downward, anticipated aught save condemnation.

"Not guilty!"

Courts of justice have many times witnessed enthusiasm, but the occasion of John Arkwright's acquittal may fairly claim a record place in the annals of popular satisfaction at a righteous judgement.

That the presiding dignitary was astounded, dissatisfied, indignant, goes without saying, clearly proving that the greater lights, legal or otherwise, are by no means infallible, or to be always relied upon for their illuminating power.

John Arkwright had heard nothing of Marjorie, save a vague rumour that she was ill, and under the care of her father's sister.

As he stands upon the steps of the Court-house, an hour after his release, he finds himself to be the object and centre of a great demonstration of local feeling.

It was distasteful to him; he wished rather for peace and quietness, not for the noisy congratulations of his fellows, howsoever sincere they might be.

Suddenly his eye and ear are attracted by enhanced movement and sound in the corner of the market-place where the crowd is densest.

Women's voices give the dominant note, and women's voices in evident angry clamour.

Catcallings—shoutings to "Duck her!" "Stone her!" "She ought to stand where Mr. John did!" This, and even worse, reached him where he stood.

Somehow it acted as the one thing to rouse his soul to the reality of return to life.

Rushing down the steps, and cleaving his way through the throng, without regard to the individual, he gained the excited mob of the town women of the baser sort that surrounded a young girl, dishevelled, and with clothes mud-stained and rent, who lay in a dead faint upon the ground.

John knew her! Was she not part of himself, since she had his heart?

"Shame on you!" he cried, kneeling down, and gently lifting Marjorie's head. "You are not women! —Who made you my avengers—and upon her? Shame on you!"

A stone had struck Marjorie perilously near the right temple, a little stream of blood trickling down on to John's hand.

"Could I but know who threw that stone!" he cried, "they should answer for it! Fetch a cart, some of you!"

And so he took her to her home, but it was long before she dared to meet his honest eyes.

Still, the time did come when she sobbed out her repentance upon his breast, and when he in complete absolution closed her lips with his own.

* * * * *

Upon John Arkwright's sheep-run in Australia, Marjorie is gradually learning to be happy, for her husband, keeping a firm hand upon the curtain that shuts out the past, brightens by his love, his care, and his untiring devotion the ever-growing contentment of a beautiful and all-satisfying present.

RALPH ENDEBBY.

Read the next footline backwards.

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TALES TOLD OFF DUTY.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

Told by the Steeple-jack.

"YES," said the short, thick-set man, who had been introdnced to the company as "Steve Kennedy—a relation o' mine," by Jack Wyatt, the fireman; "I s'pose mine is rather an uncommon sort o' trade. But there's many a worse one, I assure you. A steeple-jack earns good wages, and it's his own fault if, when jobs are scarce, he ain't got money enough put by to tide him over till brisker times come round. Anyway, I know I've never wanted for a few shillings during the time I've followed the trade—pretty near thirty years."

"Rather break-neck work though, I should think," remarked the commissionaire-sergeant.

"That's a matter of opinion," answered the steeple-jack. "For my part I'd sooner climb the highest spire or chimney shaft in the kingdom than cross some o' these London streets o' yours when the traffic's thick. Why, this very afternoon, I stood on the kerbstone about twenty minutes tryin' to pluck up nerve enough to go from one side o' the road to the other, and when I did make a dart for it, I was as near as possible bein' smashed up between a four-wheeled cab and an omnibus. Yes! you may laugh, mates, but it give me a rare fright, it did indeed; and fear's a thing I never felt when workin' on steeple or shaft—except once."

"Only once in thirty years' experience, eh?" observed the commissionaire, who scented a yarn.

"Only once, mate, and that was when I was a young chap of twenty-seven. Though I can't help shudderin' a bit whenever I think o' the affair, I've always been thankful in one way that it happened.

"It come about like this: A gang of us had been engaged for several weeks, repairin' the shaft of some spinning-works, situated a few miles away from a big Lancashire town. These works were known as 'Nicholson's,' and the shaft was one of the loftiest in the whole county.

"Well, one Saturday, me and my mates knocked off about noon, and went to our different lodgings in the village. There were eight of us in the gang, and all except me and Tom Dawson went off by the 1.30 train, to spend Saturday to Monday at Oldham, where most of us had our homes. Dawson and me had agreed to follow by a later train.

"After havin' a bit o' dinner, I was just thinkin' about changin' my togs, when there came a loud knockin' at the front door. I thought at first it was Tom Dawson, who lodged further up the street; but, presently, my landlady comes rushin' into my room, followed by a gal of twenty or thereabouts. The lass hadn't no hat on, her pretty face was as white as a sheet, and she was wringin' her hands and sobbin' as though her heart would break.

"Before I could ask what was the matter, the lass dropped on her knees in front o' me, cryin' out—'Oh! save him—save my father!' Seein' I was puzzled, the landlady beckons me out o' the room, and in about ten words tells me what was wrong.

"The girl's father, Andrew Fuller by name, had climbed up the shaft of Nicholson's Mill, and, to all appearances, fainted. He was lyin' on the narrow platform which ran round the top o' the shaft, and it was feared he would roll over the edge.

"I didn't wait to hear more. Dashin' past the landlady, I ran as hard as I could in the direction o' the Mill. In a few minutes I reached the base of the shaft, near which stood a crowd o' men, women, and children, all gazin' upwards at somethin' which, at that distance, looked little bigger than a hat.

"I went to the tool-hut, slung a coil o' rope over my shoulders, and then started to climb the shaft. I soon reached the top ladder, and, steppin' on to the platform, saw that the man Fuller was still insensible, with his head leanin' against the scaffolding, and one of his arms dangling' over the edge o' the planks. He was a big, powerful-lookin' chap of about fifty, and I saw it would be no child's play to get him safe to earth.

"Just as I was makin' a loop in my rope and thinkin' how best to tackle the job, the man suddenly sprang to his feet and stood glaring at me. Then he commenced to breathe hard and foam at the mouth, and I knew I was face to face with a madman!

"It was a nasty position to be in, and I don't mind ownin' that the awful look in Fuller's eyes almost paralysed me with terror. There we stood for a few moments wat'hing each other, until suddenly the madman gave a shriek, took a pace forward, and shot out his hand towards me, palm outwards.

"I just had time to step backwards, or over the platform I must surely have gone. Angry at my escapin' the push, Fuller came at me again, his eyes blazing and his mouth wide open. Once more, I got out of his way, and then began a chase which, even now, it makes me tremble to think of.

"The madman kept tryin' to push me over, and knowin' it would mean certain death should he spring at me from behind, I had to keep walkin' backwards to escape his outstretched hands. Round and round that narrow platform we went, Fuller's pace—and consequently mine—gettin' faster every moment. He seemed to bear a charmed life, for he had nothin' at all to hold on by, and though his foot slipped more than once over the edge o' the planks, he got his balance again directly.

"Presently he breaks into a sort o' run, and I'd all my work cut out to dodge him. Worst of all, the quick backward movement round and round the shaft was makin' me feel sick and giddy. 'Twas impossible to get on to the ladders, only a yard or so separatin' me from my pursuer. However, I makes a feint to step on to the rungs, and lucky for me I did so. For the thought that there was my only way of escape evidently crossed the lunatic's mind, and down he sits near the top of the ladder, his legs hangin' over the platform.

"Thankful for this chance of getting my breath, I leaned against the scaffolding and tried to think o' what I should do next.

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"Should I creep behind Fuller and shove him over the side. No, I couldn't somehow stomach that idea, although 'twas what looked like happenin' to me. Then the thought struck me that perhaps I should have to pass the night up there with him, and I almost shouted with terror.

"But all at once I hears some cheerin' from the crowd below, and lookin' down, I saw that a man had started to climb the shaft.

"Nearer and nearer he came, and soon I recognised him as my mate, Tom Dawson. About six feet from the top he stopped and said to the lunatic:

"'It'll soon be getting dark, old chap; hadn't you better come down off of that?'

"But Fuller only gibbered, and, clutching the side of the ladder, tried all he knew to wrench it from its fastenings.

"'The man's gone daft wi' fright, Tom,' I shouts. 'Don't come further, or he'll shove you off.'

"Fuller looks at me, grins, rubs his hands together, and turns his eyes on Tom Dawson again. Watchin' my chance, I picks up my coil of rope, makes a noose in it, and, chuckin' it over Fuller's head and shoulders, pulls it taut. Then with a sudden wrench, I jerks him backwards, kneels on his chest, and calls out:

"'Now, Tom, up you come, quick!'

"I'd hardly said it, when Dawson was on the platform helpin' me to bind the madman's limbs. That wasn't an easy matter, for the man shrieked and kicked, and tried his hardest to free himself. But Tom and me knew we were fightin' for our lives, and at last we had him trussed up in such a way that he couldn't budge.

"Then came the question: how to get him to the ground? If it had been planks or bricks o' the same weight, we should 'a done the job without much trouble; but carryin' down them almost perpendicularly-fixed ladders, a man, who, though bound, might by a sudden jerk cause us to lose our balance, was a very ticklish task.

"Dawson and me were tryin' to think out some plan, when the very best thing that could have happened did happen. Fuller fainted again.

"We didn't attempt to bring him to. We just got hold of him, one at each end, and carefully began to descend the ladders.

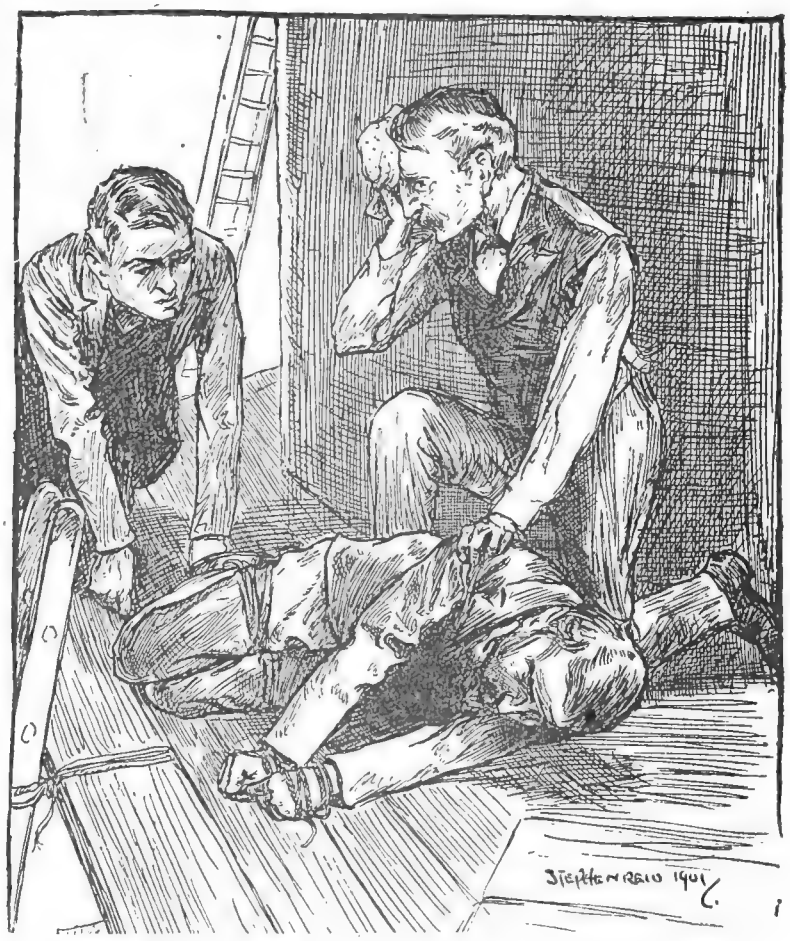
"Step by step we went, carrying our senseless burden, and when at last we reached the ground, I dropped down exhausted, while Tom Dawson was in little better plight.

"It was many weeks before Andrew Fuller got his senses back.

"Why had he climbed the shaft? Oh! just for a five-shilling wager. He and some of his cronies had been drinkin' together that Saturday afternoon, and somehow their talk had turned on us steeple-jacks and how risky our work must be. Fuller had laughed at the idea, and said 'twas no more risky than workin' at a cotton-loom! At that, somebody offered to bet a crown Fuller would be afraid to climb the shaft, and Fuller, bein' a bit in his cups, said 'done.'

"Well, he got to the top all right, waved his cap, came over dizzy, and then swooned with fear. When he came to, he was daft; and as he often told me afterwards, remembered nothin' o' having chased me round and round the platform, or of his bein' bound and carried down the ladders by me and Dawson.

"They say it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," the steeple-jack concluded; "that old proverb came true in this case. How? Well, mates, but for Fuller havin' climbed the mill shaft, I might never have made the acquaintance of his daughter Kate, the prettiest lass in all Lancashire—at any rate, that's what she was to my eye. Kate and me have been man and wife now a matter o' twenty-five years, and real good partner she's proved herself to be."



Fuller fainted again.

Finest Serial ever written "The Golden Dwarf."

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MY WIFE'S HYPNOTIC EXPERIENCES.

We were discussing hypnotism, a lot of the younger members, at the Cosmopolitan Club the other night, and after any number of opinions had been given on the matter, I turned to old Briggs, who had just come into the smoking-room, and said:

"I say, Briggs, you are a pretty shrewd card; you've seen a little of about everything going. What do you think of hypnotism—is it a fake or not?"

Briggs did not answer for a moment or so; he busied himself lighting his cigar, and then turning slowly round in his chair so as to face our group, he answered:

"I can't tell what to believe about it, for I own frankly I can't make up my mind what it is; but I will tell you of an incident in my life that will at least prove that it is not a fake.

"Most of you youngsters know Mrs. Briggs, and you are perfectly aware that she is not a weak-minded woman, nor an imaginative one, by any means; on the contrary, she is very level-headed, and has quite as much business ability as I have, infinitely more tact, and much keener intuition. I speak of this," he added, "because she was the person chiefly interested in the little story I am about to relate.

"Ten or twelve years ago, just after I had been admitted as junior partner in my father's firm, I went abroad, taking my wife with me. We spent a few days in Boulogne, and then went to Paris, where we knew a good many people, and taking a nice apartment in the hotel—well, never mind the name of our hotel—we settled down to enjoy our holiday as much as possible.

"Maria (Mrs. Briggs) went in, of course, for a round of shopping, dresses and millinery, and all that sort of thing, but above all, she had set her heart on having a *bonâ fide* tip-top French maid. I had never been able to afford her a maid before, but on the strength of my partnership she determined to have one that combined all the qualities that go to make a perfect lady's maid, and she must be French. So she advertised in all the newspapers and through all her friends; and one day, about a fortnight after we arrived in Paris, I came in from a morning stroll to find Maria in a most delightful humour, and the possessor of all that was to be wished in the way of a maid. She (the maid) had letters innumerable from all sorts of fashionables, and her last employer spread herself over four sheets of perfumed coroneted notepaper in such a decidedly overdrawn style, that I thought it looked rather fishy, so I took the precaution of looking her up myself that very afternoon.

"I found her to be a most delightful old lady, living in the finest quarters of Paris, and apparently a great lady herself. She told me the only reason for Melaine leaving her service was that the girl wished to go to England, that she might prosecute a search for a long-lost scamp of a brother, who, she had reason to believe, was in that country.

"I returned perfectly satisfied as to the girl's character, and that night I saw her for the first time as she answered my knock at my wife's door when I called for her to go out to dinner. She was tall, raw-boned woman, sallow skin, black hair, perfect teeth, and a very peculiar pair of eyes. I cannot tell you in what the peculiarity lay—not in the colour, for they were the ordinary black eyes of the bourgeoise class; not in the shape, nor in the expression; but the effect of those eyes upon one at first sight was peculiar, for it was the effect of making one forget that she was a servant, and you found yourself involuntarily treating her with the familiarity of an equal.

"Things ran along in their ordinary routine for a couple of days after Melanie's arrival, until dinner time of the second day. I had just finished my soup, when a servant handed me a wire in the firm's cipher, requesting me to return without delay.

"I shoved the message across to my wife, hastily excused myself, went into the office, and, consulting a Bradshaw, found I could catch a train, and so crossed to Folkestone that night.

"Arrived in London, I took a cab from the station, and rushed into the private office, where I found my father and our other partner, old Jiggs (my father-in-law), sitting with my message before them, awaiting me.

"'What's the matter?' cried my Governor.

"'Where's Maria?' shouted old Jiggs.

"'What do you want of me?' cried I.

"And then we all three stood looking at one another stupidly, waiting each for the other to speak. I took out my note-case, produced their telegram, and handed it over. Jiggs looked at it, and then handed it to my father. He read it over, got out our cipher code, translated it, rang his bell for the correspondence clerk, handed him the message, and awaited an explanation.

"The clerk read it, examined the date of it, and quietly but firmly repudiated it. He then produced his letter-book and showed all his correspondence for that date, and sure enough, my fateful message was not among it. I dismissed the clerk with an intimation not to speak of the matter to anyone, and then my father, partner and self held a consultation.

"The first thing to be done, of course, was to wire to Maria.

"Late that night the despatch was returned by the manager of the hotel, with a message from him saying Madame and maid had left the hotel the same day I had.

"I went straight to Scotland Yard, and told my little tale to the superintendent there.

"He was a very wise man, that superintendent, for he knew enough to hold his tongue and let me tell my

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story out. Then he closed his note-book with a click, and said:

"'Call at your address, sir, between 8. 30 and 9. 30,' and bowed me out.

"At nine o'clock that evening a Scotland Yard man visited me. His report amounted simply to this: My cable message was, of course, simply a plant to get me out of the way; then my wife (probably by means of another forged telegram) had been abducted for the sake of ransom, and was now being held in duress somewhere, until I should advertise a large enough reward for her return—when her abductors would correspond with me. All this, of course, I knew; but I did get one little grain of information from him, and that was that they were sure that Maria and her captors were not in England. I must look for them on the Continent, if anywhere. The detective was very certain of this, and, in fact, so was I.

"After the detective had made his report and left me alone, I lighted a cigar and sat down to think the matter out.

"To begin with, the forged dispatch in our cipher had been sent by confederates in London. How had they got our code? Suddenly, like a flash it came to me; my wife's maid, Melanie, was at the bottom of the whole thing. I was in the habit of carrying a copy of our cipher in my note-case. It was a very short and concise one, and consisted of only some twenty words or so. She had purloined the cipher, copied it, cabled the message to some accomplice in London, and he had cabled it back to me. This was easily enough done, for my bedroom opened into my wife's, in our apartments in Paris; and it was my habit, when I dressed for dinner, to leave my note-case in the pocket of my morning coat, or lying carelessly on mantel or table.

"Melanie, of course, had the run of the rooms. But how had she induced Maria to leave Paris with her, and hope to keep her, in hiding. For Maria was no ordinary woman; she was strong physically as mentally, and since she had more pluck than most men, she was not one to be easily influenced or intimidated. The longer I thought the matter over, the less I understood it; and at last, tired and dispirited, I turned in, resolved to leave London for Paris on the morrow.

"I arrived in Paris on the second day, and went straight to the Hotel ——, where I had left Maria.

"I had an interview with the manager, in which he gave me all the information he could about Maria's departure, which amounted simply to the bare facts that on the morning after I had left, she had sent down for her bill, paid it, and left the hotel in company with her maid, saying nothing to anyone as to where she was going.

"I left the hotel and called on some of our most

"What's the matter?" cried my Governor.
"Where's Maria?" shouted old Jiggs.

intimate friends, but got nothing from them but condolences, and they were of no practical use.

"A strange phase of the affair was that I never for a moment felt anxiety on my wife's account. I felt assured that I should find her very shortly, and I never thought even that she might be subjected to abuse, or anything worse than restraint.

"I had made up my mind by this time not to have anything more to do with detectives. I was going to

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find Maria myself. All I needed was some good muscular fellow, that would stand by me in case there was any resistance offered to my rescuing her when I found her. He must be a Frenchman, as I was not able to speak or understand the language to any extent.

"I returned to the hotel about five o'clock, and found my Hawkshaw there with a French brother-in-arms, awaiting my arrival.

"They bored me with a long report as to theories, and so on, and I smoked and mentally consigned them to the devil.

"After they had left me in peace, promising to report again to-morrow, I dressed, and dined in the hotel restaurant.

"I noticed that my appearance in the dining-room caused a little flutter among the waiters, and the dignified head man conveyed me to the choicest table in the room, and handed me the menu card in a manner at once dignified and sympathetic. They remembered, and of course the 'Affaire Briggs' was the talk of the house. I smiled to myself, and devoted a few minutes to a study of my card.

"As I raised my eyes I met the gaze of a man seated at a table directly opposite.

"He was dining with a companion, another man, who sat facing him, and consequently with his back to me. The eyes that met my own seemed in some way familiar. They were black and very keen, and gazed at once in a very quiet, authoritative manner that made it almost an impertinence to return the gaze.

"Although I had no recollection of having seen the man before, there was something familiar to me about him. He was slight, of medium height, wore a short, pointed moustache and imperial, and in dress and manner was certainly a gentleman.

"I busied myself with my dinner, and yet I could not keep my eyes off the man opposite me. The table he occupied was some little distance from me, but as the two or three tables intervening were unoccupied, I had a clear view of him, and as often as my eyes strayed in his direction they met his, until at last it seemed to me there was a mocking gleam in those black eyes, meant for me.

"Presently the black-eyed man and his friend rose and left the dining-room. I followed them idly with my eyes, and as they passed out of the door my *vis-à-vis*, who was last, turned and (was it imagination?) smiled a very ironical, exasperating smile full in my face.

"'So much for your impertinence in staring strangers out of countenance in a public dining-room,' I thought at first; but no, I had not stared any more than he had. Every time I looked at him he was looking at me. The incident had impressed me, and my mind reverted to it no matter how often I put it by.

"I finished my dinner as slowly as possible, for I was enjoying it, and in fact, did not know what to do with myself afterwards, and presently on ordering coffee and lighting my cigar, I noticed I was alone in the big room, save for the waiters.

"As I noticed this, I also noticed that the man that had been waiting on me had been replaced by another waiter, and the new man seemed to be anxious to speak to me.

"He hovered around after I had paid my bill, and at first I thought he was waiting for a tip, as the tip I had already given him, of course, went to the man whose place he had taken; but when I offered him a ten-sous piece he refused it, and, as he did so, whispered in my ear:

"'Meet me in one hour in front of the Café des Anglais; I have something for you.'

"This he said quickly in English, and then as quickly disappeared.

"My first thought was that it was a plant, but a rendezvous in so public a spot could not be dangerous, and I decided to go.

"I went up to my room, slipped on an overcoat, and started out to keep my appointment.

"As I passed down the grand staircase of the hotel I passed the man I had noticed at dinner coming up. He saw me too, and again his eyes challenged me.

"I turned and looked over my shoulder at him after I had descended a few steps, and found him looking back at me. I felt annoyed at my seeming impertinence and faced quickly away, but not before I saw the same sneering smile I had got at dinner. I passed quickly out on the boulevard, lighted a cigar, looked at my watch, found I had half-an-hour before my rendezvous was due—just time to stroll slowly there.

"The lights inside and outside the Café des Anglais were flooding the walk as I passed it for the first time, without meeting the waiter. I walked a little distance beyond it before retracing my steps.

"As I passed the main entrance the second time, a man stopped me, and said: 'You're Mr. Briggs, are you not?' in perfect English. I hesitated for a moment before answering, and he said: 'You need not fear a plant, sir. I'm taking the place of a friend of mine, who made an appointment to meet you here at this hour. He is unable to be here, and sent me to say to you: "Find out about the sick gentleman in Number Fourteen, Hotel ——." Remember, Number Fourteen.' And before I could speak, the fellow was off. I started to follow him, but he was too quick for me, and soon I lost sight of him.

"Here I confess I was puzzled. What had I to do with any sick gentleman in Number Fourteen or in any other number? But suddenly it struck me Fourteen was the number of the suite I had occupied in the Hotel —— before, and where I had left Maria. That settled it, and from that moment I was determined to find out everything about the sick gentleman. But how? I could go and ask the manager, and he would refer me to the register, where I should find his name (any name he chose to write) and his domicile. I wanted to see the inside of Number Fourteen—see the sick gentleman.

"I thought hard and walked hard, as is my habit, as I came to my decision to see the gentleman in Number Fourteen. I suddenly came to a halt in my walk, and found that I was lost. I do not know Paris very well, and now I found I had wandered into an entirely new part of it to me. I looked about me for a landmark to guide myself by, and as I did so my eyes lighted on a small, brightly polished brass sign, which read in English: 'Private Enquiry Office,' and below, the name Lavalle, 'Ring Number Four.'

"I rang Number Four without a moment's hesitation. The door opened, and an old man in a red nightcap motioned me upstairs. I ascended flight after flight of very steep stairs, until at length, at the top of the last flight, I came face to face with another brass plate on a door, on which was inscribed 'Lavalle.'

Read the next footline backwards.

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"There was a light within. The door opened to my knock, and I found myself face to face with Lavelle himself. He motioned me to a chair and asked me my business. I studied him as I told my story, and when I had finished, was satisfied I had found a man I could depend on. He was of medium height, evidently of great strength and activity, and his clean-shaven face told of determination and pluck. He heard me out to the end, hardly making an interruption, and when I had finished, he said:

"'You are right in one thing, at least, Mr. Briggs. We will find out all about the gentleman in Number Fourteen before we sleep to-night; and now, if you please, we will adjourn to the Hotel ——.'

"He picked up his coat and hat as he spoke, and we made our way to the street, and hailing the first fiacre we met, we were at the hotel just as the clock were striking twelve.

"Lavalle led the way to the office and demanded that his card be taken at once to the manager. That individual appeared at once in answer, and we three were soon closeted in his private room, where I put him in possession of the events of the night. He promised all assistance in his power, and first of all produced the register. There we found that on May 17th, the day after Maria had given up the rooms, Number Fourteen had been assigned to a Mr. Burton, of London, accompanied by a servant, and a Doctor Languedoc, of Vienna, in attendance. Mr. Burton was an invalid, suffering from some intense nervous disorder that necessitated complete quiet; so much so, that none of the hotel servants were allowed inside the rooms. The Doctor had assured the manager that the disease was not in any way infectious, and as their bills were large and promptly met, the manager was loath to have any trouble with so good a patron.

I gazed in silent amazement at the trim, neat woman.

"Lavalle insisted, however, that he should, at least, see Doctor Languedoc. 'I have an idea that I know him, and if it is the man I think, he will not offer much resistance to my inspecting Number Fourteen.'

"After some further discussion, the manager sent a servant to Number Fourteen, asking Doctor Languedoc to step down to the office. Saying, 'I will be back in a moment,' Lavalle followed the servant.

"I sat anxiously awaiting developments. At the expiration of some few minutes the servant returned, looking slightly excited, and said M. Lavalle requested the manager and myself to step up to Number Fourteen.

"We did so, the manager in the lead, and as he knocked at the door, Lavalle's voice bade us enter. We found Lavalle standing in front of the fire, and sitting in an armchair near him was my friend of the restaurant.

"As we entered, Lavalle said:

"'Mr. Briggs, allow me to introduce my friend Doctor Languedoc, *alias* Doctor Robert, *alias* several other names, a gentleman who is an ornament to two professions, medicine and hypnotism. He has a very interesting case in the next room, to which he is about to introduce us. You, Mr. Briggs, may be rather surprised

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when you see the patient; but the Doctor will explain. Now, Doctor, with your permission, we will examine your patient.'

"Languedoc rose, and led the way into the bedroom, followed closely by Lavalle, the manager, and myself The room was furnished in the ordinary French style, the bed curtained, and the curtains drawn. A man sat in a large easy chair, before the fire. He glared at us with no very amiable expression, but said nothing.

"'I may as well tell you again, Doctor,' said Lavalle, 'that my men are guarding every entrance to the hotel.'

"Languedoc merely bowed assent; said:

"'You hear, Jacques,' to the man at the fire, and stepping to the bedside, drew back the curtains.

"I took one look at the face on the pillow, and dearly as I love my wife, shocked and horrified as I was to find the poor girl in such a position, I could hardly restrain my laughter. It was Maria right enough, but Maria as a man—a middle-aged man. Her hair was cut short, and her large features carried out the effect. Her face had taken on the petulant, peevish expression of a middle-aged hypochondriac.

"Lavalle looked at me with an interrogative expression, and I merely nodded. Languedoc dropped the curtains, and we all returned to the outer room, including the Doctor's co-conspirator.

"'And now, Doctor,' Lavalle suggested, 'you will kindly give us the details of this little conspiracy, and we will decide what to do with you?'

"'There is no conspiracy,' Languedoc replied very coolly. 'That gentleman in there is Mr. Burton, an English gentleman under my charge as long as I will him to be. Listen.' And he opened the door into the bedroom, and called, 'Mr. Burton, how do you feel to-night?'

"'Very badly, Doctor, very, very!' came the reply from the bed, unmistakably in Maria's voice. but how changed from her full, rich tone to the querulous one of a hypochondriac.

"'You see,' said Languedoc. 'Now I have a few little terms to make. If they are not agreed to, why, Mr. Burton may remain Mr. Burton as far as I am concerned, and——'

"'Name your terms,' I interrupted. 'For Heaven's sake, let us get this devil's business over!'

"The Doctor smiled amiably at me, and said: 'I am very glad you are inclined to take so sensible a view of the matter, Mr. Briggs. My terms are simply that after I have restored your wife to you, sound in mind and body, you will hand me five thousand francs, and allow me to depart in peace, and in the meantime, my friend, here,' pointing to the other scoundrel, 'be allowed to go at once.'

"'I agree,' I answered. 'Let this fellow,' I said to Lavalle, 'restore my wife to her normal condition, he shall have his freedom and his money.'

"Lavalle bowed assent, and Languedoc said: 'Now, if you will excuse me for one moment, until I make a slight change in my costume, I will return, and then you shall learn all the particulars of this unfortunate affair.'

"He disappeared into a dressing-room, that opened off the sitting-room, and connected the two sleeping chambers of the suite; and in a wonderfully short time reappeared, and to my astonished eyes, in the person and costume of my wife's ex-maid, Melanie. I gazed in silent amazement at the trim, neat woman, as she stood before us, curtseying gracefully to us all, and in a moment the whole clever plot flashed through my brain.

"Of course, Languedoc was Melanie, or Melanie was Languedoc. I was too much surprised for a moment to utter a word; but Lavalle rose, and placing a chair, gravely invited Melanie to be seated.

"She thanked him with a charming smile; and asking our permission first, lighted a cigarette, and proceeded to give us the details of the whole plot, which in short was as follows:

"She had studied medicine at one time, and had taken a great interest in hypnotism, in which science she made great progress, at least, as far as being able to exercise her magnetic power over others went. When she had been at the medical school for a year or so, she met a young student, with whom she fell in love. Together they developed their hypnotic powers, and even practised medicine in Berlin, until the doctors of that city made it too warm for them.

"Then they were forced to turn to some other means of obtaining a living, and it was during this part of her career that Lavalle had known her under the name of Dr. Robert; and in the employ of the regular practitioners of Berlin, he (Lavalle) had been instrumental in ridding the city of two of the most notorious charlatans that ever rooked a confiding public.

"After they had been forced to close their sanitorium (for they had a very large and lucrative one just out of Berlin), the male partner in the firm became engaged in some affair that put him within the reach of the criminal law, and to escape arrest he fled to Paris.

"Melanie, in order to earn money to live on and to eventually join him there, had, through forged letters, obtained a position as maid in the employ of the lady from whom she came to my wife. The scheme of getting me out of the way, and then placing Maria under her influence and carrying her off and holding her for ransom, did not occur to her until after she had an opportunity to inspect my private letters and other memoranda that she found in my note case, which I used to leave carelessly lying around my rooms.

"She made out a cipher message recalling me, cabled it to a friend in London, with instructions to him to cable it back to me.

"I bit, as you know, and the night after my departure she put Maria 'under control,' as she expressed it; and told her that she was an elderly gentleman, an invalid, that her name was Burton, and that she (Melanie) was her medical adviser. Then, of course, as such, she simply willed every thought of Maria's, and she became an automaton, of which Melanie pulled the wires.

"After supplying Maria with the necessary wardrobe, and engaging the services of the nurse (who had been in

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her employ before), Melanie, whose boldness of conception and execution was her strong point, came to the very hotel Maria had just left, and finding the suite No. 14 unoccupied, she engaged it.

"The waiter who gave me the tip was an old employé of Melanie and her lover. He had not been well treated by them and took this way of getting even. As I had left Maria plenty of cash there was no difficulty on the score of funds, and had it not been for Melanie's misfortune in running across that waiter in the restaurant, her 'grand coup,' as she called it, would most likely have been successful.

"I have condensed the story as Melanie told it, but these are the main facts. As she finished her account of the affair, she rose and said:

"'Now, Mr. Briggs, the next thing is to restore Madame to herself and you. I will arrange the rooms exactly as they were before she previously left them; and when I have dressed her as she should be, I will recall her to herself, and put her under the impression that she has been ill, to account in that way for the loss of her hair and the lapse of time. Then I will disappear, and you, Mr. Briggs, can pretend that I stole that five thousand francs and the money I have spent belonging to your wife. You will find Madame's jewels and wardrobe exactly as she left them. I, of course, had to have new canvas covers made for her trunks and dress baskets, but you will find the old covers and labels underneath.'

"Melanie was as good as her word, and in a few minutes had the rooms arranged as they were when we last occupied them, the covers off the luggage; and Maria, clad in her proper garments, was sleeping quietly when Melanie called me into the bedroom to witness the change from Mr. Burton to Mrs. Briggs.

"Lavalle and I stood together at the foot of the bed, the hotel resident physician (who had been summoned and instructed by the manager and myself as to the part he was to play) stood at the right hand of Maria, with his fingers on her pulse. Melanie, in a careless attitude, peaceful and nonchalant, stood at her left. She glanced at me inquiringly. I nodded assent, and she called in a low, clear tone, 'Mrs. Briggs, Mrs. Briggs,' instead of using the more conventional 'Madame' common among French servants.

"Maria opened her eyes slowly, and as they fell on me, she said:

"'Oh, you've got home, have you, John?' And then to the physician: 'Well, Doctor, I feel stronger to-night, I think. I may get up to-morrow, may I not?'

"The Doctor played his part to perfection, and I hastened from the room to hide my emotion; for now that my wife was restored to me, I realised how awful an ordeal of anxiety I had passed through, and how awful an adventure had been hers, although she had not realised it.

"A few minutes later, the Doctor, accompanied by Melanie and Lavalle, came to me.

"'Madame seems to be perfectly rational, monsieur,' said the Doctor. 'Her mind is perfectly clear, and save for slight physical weakness, accounted for by want of fresh air and exercise, and her diet of light food, she is perfectly well. In a week, at the farthest, she will be able to travel. I will look in in the morning,' and saying good-night, he went his way.

"'Now, monsieur,' said Melanie, 'I have restored your wife to you as you left her. You will kindly hand me the money you promised, and I will go.'

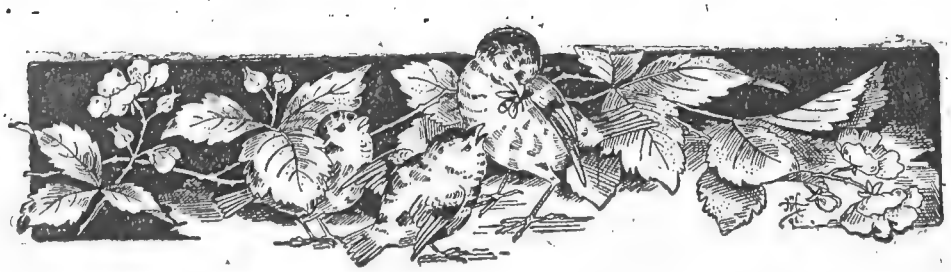
"I had procured the cash in French bank-notes from the manager, and handed them over to her without a word. She took them, slipped them into the bosom of her frock, and left the room. Returning with her bonnet and jacket on, she said:

"'Good-bye, Mr. Briggs. You have treated me as a gentleman, and I will say I am glad that after all my plan miscarried; but oh, gentlemen, think of what a coup it was. I should have had a hundred thousand—yes, two hundred thousand francs. You are very rich, Mr. Briggs—it is nothing to you, and to me it would be wealth; and then how cleverly the whole thing was conceived, and how boldly carried out, only to be spoiled by that pig of a waiter. But I will not cry over spilt milk. Good-bye again, Mr. Briggs. M. Lavalle, I leave at once for America. You will never be bothered by me again. We shall not meet again, Mr. Briggs. *Au revoir!*' And with that stepped gracefully out of the door, and out of my life at the same time.

"I sat talking with Lavalle for an hour or so. I commissioned him to find the man who had given me the tip, and reward him, for I intended to remove my wife from Paris as soon as possible, and did not want to be bothered with any outside affairs. After paying him for his services I said good-bye, just as the sun was gilding the east. I looked in at my wife; she was sleeping as peacefully as a child, and throwing myself on a sofa, I pulled a rug over me and was soon asleep.

"I was awakened a few hours later by the vigorous ringing of Maria's bell. Jumping up, I hastened to her side, and from her reception of my news, properly administered as befitting such intelligence to an invalid, I was convinced that I had indeed found Maria, and in her normal condition."

G. C. B.



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By HEADON HILL.

Author of "The Peril of the Prince," "Seaward for the Foe," "Guilty Gold," etc.

CHAPTER XIV. (*continued*).

"I say, it is nearly eleven o'clock; my father will be here directly," he bleated. "Wouldn't it be fun to have a lark with him?"

"As to how?" asked the winner.

"Why, run me up in the lift, so that when he comes in he won't see me," said the "Kid." "Then when he's fairly scared at my not being here, run me down again, and there I am in front of him, like a Jack-in-the-box. Do, please."

A practical joke at the expense of an anxious father was quite in the line of Tamponi's patrons, and the idea caught on instantly.

"Keep your head back, then, and sit quite still till we run you down," was the reply, and the jerk of a rope sent the lift spinning merrily up the shaft, with the "Kid" huddled in it like a chicken in an egg. The bevy of flushed faces was blotted from his sight, the noisy racket of the bar grew suddenly faint and far off, there were three seconds of black darkness, and the youthful detective stood on the first floor triumphant, with the door of the locked room in front of him.

The key had been removed; but Fergusson's forethought had provided him with the means of entering, and he worked the picklocks with feverish haste, lest the heedless crew below should take it into their heads to pull down the lift.

Two or three of the instruments he tried in vain, and then the fourth did the trick, and the door opened, revealing the apparently lifeless body of Zambra lying in his waiter's dress by the piano. Snatching the brandy decanter from the table, the boy poured such dregs as were left between his master's lips, and in five seconds the latter was struggling to his feet, eager to hear what his young assistant had to tell him.

That was no place for words, but it was the proudest moment the "Kid's" professional career had yet brought him, when at the close of his briefly whispered narrative Zambra wrung his hand and said as they glided on to the landing:

"There may yet be time to head off these villains; if so, it is of your making, my boy. Ah, I thought so. Here is a second staircase leading to the private entrance. Step softly, and a minute will see us safely in the street."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEAD MAN'S SECRET.

By the time Marion had disentangled her dress, Simon had his foot on the bottom step. Acting on a frantic impulse to place some barrier, no matter what, between her and that cruel smile, the girl pulled the door to after her, and stood clinging to the handle for dear life. In doing so she had at first no hope other than to gain a few seconds' respite, but it quickly flashed upon her that it might mean more than that. The door, opening inwards, had no handle on the reverse side. There was nothing, therefore, for her assailants to catch hold of in order to open it by pulling it towards them. So long as by throwing all her weight on the handle and dragging it to her, she could keep the door so tightly closed that they could not get their fingers in, so long would she be able to keep them at bay.

Almost immediately there was a scratching and fumbling on the inside of the jamb, and the hateful voice croaked:

"It is only I, my dear niece—your poor old Uncle Sam, depriving himself of his night's rest on your behalf. I have an assistant of your friend, Mr. Zambra, with me. We are acting on his instructions to test a theory about the missing money, and we came in through the kitchen window so as not to disturb you. Open the door, there's a good girl, and I will soon explain to your satisfaction."

"You murdering villain!" Marion called through the door, "I heard every word you said in the sitting-room and down there just now. You may kill me, but you cannot deceive me again."

There was no direct reply, but Hoathley turned and called to Tasker, and the fumbling and scratching began again. One of them was endeavouring to get enough purchase on the door to open it wide enough for the insertion of a finger; but Marion, grasping the handle and leaning back with her feet firmly planted, was able to frustrate their efforts. For quite half an hour the contest continued, and a wild hope began to take possession of her that she might hold out till help came. Morning was beginning to break, and in an hour or two there might be early haymakers passing on their way to work whom she could attract by screaming, failing which the farm boy who brought her milk was due at seven o'clock. It would be worse than useless to try to raise an alarm as yet; she must husband her strength till the world was awake.

Suddenly there was a muttered oath on the other side of the door, and the fingering and groping ceased. Marion thought it was a ruse to make her relax her grasp, but she soon found that the attempt had only been dropped to be replaced by others of a more effectual kind. Hoathley had thrown aside all pretence now, and his voice came plainly through the door, bidding Tasker fetch the crowbar.

"Enough of these bungling experiments," he hissed, addind more loudly, "we're going to break the door down, my lady, so you'd better say your prayers, unless you'd rather wait till the Reverend Simon comes through to shrive you."

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The ferocious sarcasm was followed by repeated blows from the heavy iron tool on the framework of the door. The point of the instrument was directed at the seam of the jamb, with the evident object of gaining such a vantage that the crowbar could be used as a lever. Marion's heart sank as the door quivered beneath the crashing assault, and she recognised that her last bulwark was doomed. Though the massive old oak offered a stout resistance, and there was no room on the narrow steps for more than one to carry on the assault at the same time, yet it was plain that the catastrophe would not be long delayed. Now and again the point of the crowbar penetrated far enough to effect a lodgment, and the wrench that followed nearly broke Marion's wrist. But still the desperate girl held on, knowing with Hoathley's villainous words ringing in her ears, that to yield was to die. Well it was that she did so, for every few minutes the crafty wretch would lay aside his implement to make, in the quiet that followed, a stealthy attempt with his fingers, on the chance that her vigilence was relaxed.

It was after one of these pauses that the crowbar was driven home with increased violence, and Simon's voice was heard, saying:

"Well done, another in the same place and we have her," Evidently the younger and stronger arm had relieved the elder. Another such blow and the end would be at hand. Marion gave herself up for lost and as hope fled away she found herself wondering at the great calm that had been vouchsafed to her.

An hour before she had dreaded death, but now she chiefly saw in the coming tragedy a sure and certain deliverance for Cuthbert Blakesly. A feeling of relief that suspense would now be past, and a simple hope that her persecutors would not be unnecessarily cruel, were the sensations that flashed through her as she waited for the next stroke to fall.

Five seconds more and it came, smashing and tearing through the woodwork, with such force that a few splinters fell out at Marion's feet.

There was a triumphant chuckle from within, and a hoarse croak of "Put all your muscle into it, man," and Marion felt the door wrenched from her clutch, to open inwards, and reveal the flushed face of Tasker, and Hoathley's oily sneer on the steps below.

The elder scoundrel took off his hat, and made a mock bow, nodding and smiling at his victim, as he had done on the occasion of his first appearance at the window, and it was the moment's delay caused by his fantastic pantomime that saved Marion's life. For just as Hoathley began to push past his companion, with his right hand plunged deep in his breast pocket, there was a thunderous knock at the front door, and sweeter than any music, the voices of many men and peremptory demands for admission fell on Marion's ears.

With a wild cry of joy she sprang backwards and rushed across the hall to withdraw the bolts. Casting a look behind she saw Hoathley emerge from the cellar, and after one hesitating glance in her direction run in his stockinged feet down the passage towards the kitchen, quickly followed by Tasker. It was nearly daylight now, and Marion made short work of the chains and bolts, shouting as she did so, "They are gone by the back."

Instantly there was a rush of feet as some of the party ran round to the rear, and the next moment, as the door swung open, Zambra with a bandage on his head, and looking very pale and stern, burst across the threshold followed by Superintendent Gunning, Inspector Dimmock, and several others.

"Through the kitchen, I think," was all Marion could say, as she sank panting against the wall to let them pass.

"Look after the lady," cried Zambra, rushing by, and Neil Ferguson, who had accompanied his master, remained to obey the injunction. The rest hurried through the kitchen, where an open window showed how the entrance and egress had been effected. The pursuers leaped through in hot haste, to find that those who had run round the house at Marion's cry were close to the heels of the quarry. Hoathley, slightly in advance, was making for the corner of the unfinished wall which Michael had built between the waste garden ground and the paddock. Tasker followed at a few paces interval, while the most nimble of the policemen was running well up on the tracks of the broker's clerk. Suddenly one of Tasker's shoeless feet came in contact with a jagged stone, and with a cry of rage he fell to the ground Quick as lightning his right hand dived into his hip pocket, and there was a glint of metal.

"Look out, constable! he's going to shoot," shouted Zambra, hurrying forward.

But the pistol was not turned on his pursuers. Lying on his side as he fell, Tasker levelled the revolver at Hoathley's flying figure, just as the latter was rounding the angle of the wall. There was a sharp report, a scream of fear and pain, and the arch-villain rolled over writhing like a scotched snake in the dewy grass. And then the hue and cry closed round.

"Handcuff and search them at once, men," said the superintendent. "I notice that the bullet has smashed his kneecap, and passing on has splintered a brick at the corner of the wall."

"I strongly suspect it has done more than that," said Zambra, who had pushed through the crowd, and was on his knees picking at the split brick with the point of his penknife "If I am not very much mistaken, it has solved the mystery of the missing money, and clinched my theory that Standbridge hid the hoard himself after, or before, building the strong-room as a blind. See here!" and as he spoke he detached a sovereign from the interior of the brick, where it had been embedded in the clay before baking. The edges of two similar coins were also sticking from the fragment, which on being further broken up yielded altogether five pounds in gold.

"Pull down a few more bricks in different places," said Zambra to one of the constables not occupied in guarding the prisoners, and on the order being carried out, each brick was found to contain five sovereigns similarly embedded. Zambra ran his eye over the wall and made a rapid calculation.

"The wall is about thirty yards long, and, roughly, there are, say, a hundred bricks in each yard of its length, which gives us an approximate total of three thousand bricks. Suppose five sovereigns to be in each brick, we get as a result the sum of £15,000, which, allowing for errors, is sufficiently near the amount which Mr. Standbridge withdrew from the bank. Gentlemen, I think we may look upon this case as in a fair way to be cleared up."

The baffled greed and hate on Simon Hoathley's face were bad to see as he grovelled on the ground while a policeman tried to staunch the blood from his wounded knee. He forgot the pain in the agony of Zambra's discovery—a discovery which meant that he had forfeited his life for what he never could have gained, and that Michael's cunning had after all overmatched his own. But his cup was not yet full. As yet he was in ignorance that it was his accomplice who had shot him, and he was to learn the fact in a manner which brushed away the last lingering shred of hope.

True to his maxim of adapting himself to circumstances, Swinley Tasker had already chosen the *rôle* which the altered conditions demanded. He meant to play the part of the model prisoner who "goes quietly" and "gives every assistance to the police." Assuming an air of respectful penitence dashed with indignation, he addressed the superintendent. Marion and Fergusson had now joined the group.

Read the next footline backwards.

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"I wish to make a statement," said Tasker. "I want to tell you why I helped to prevent that man's escape. I know that you will use what I say against me, but I can't help that. I shall get more credit by speaking than by silence."

"Go on," said Gunning, producing his notebook; "I am taking down your statement to be used as evidence, remember."

"I shot that scoundrel," proceeded Tasker, "because he led me into this trouble in ignorance that there was to be murder in it, and also because, till my bullet revealed the secret, I believed that Hoathley had himself removed the gold. I thought he had brought me here in order to compromise me in a second murder; and when I tripped and fell I was wild to think that he might escape and leave me to bear the brunt.

"These are the facts of Michael Standbridge's murder. Some time towards the end of last year Hoathley came to the office of Strauss and Lightfoot, where I was employed, and offered a few diamonds for sale. In the course of the transaction he told me that he had been done out of a share of a big diamond by the drowning, or supposed drowning, of a partner, for even then he had his doubts if the man were really dead. The conversation recalled to my mind a sale to the firm some months previously of a very valuable diamond by a person who called himself Wilson. Lightfoot, who had only then begun to suspect me of evil courses, tried to keep the knowledge of the deal from me; but I saw the entry in his cheque-book and guessed the rest.

"When he was at our office, this man Wilson—I now know him to have been Mr. Standbridge—treated me roughly, and I had a grudge against him On the chance of gratifying it I had preserved an envelope in his writing, and this I showed to Hoathley, who at once recognised it as having been written by his partner and half-brother. Hoathley then made a bargain with me that if I would give him Standbridge's address he would share with me anything he could recover. I regret to say that having got into bad company, and being involved by betting, I was unable to withstand the inducement. I gave the address at the Metropolitan and Counties Bank, at Reading, whence Hoathley easily traced Mr. Standbridge here.

"Hoathley spent many months in Reading in disguise, and learned all the rumours about the strong-room and the supposed hoard. He also ascertained that the only person with whom the deceased was at all intimate was Blakesly, the cashier at the bank, and he has since told me that it was on that account he decided to throw suspicion on Mr. Blakesly in any scheme he might carry out. He had a double reason for involving Blakesly when he learned early last week that Mr. Standbridge's daughter had turned up in the young lady to whom Blakesly was engaged.

"It was this discovery which precipitated matters. Four days before the murder I had a letter from Hoathley at Reading asking me to take the envelope in my possession which had been written by Mr. Standbridge as a copy, and to forge a letter and envelope of which he sent me the draft.

"The letter was the one mentioned by Blakesly at the inquest, inviting him to Kennett's Cross. I forged the letter and envelope the same night at my lodgings, and posted them under cover to Hoathley at Reading. I had no idea that Hoathley meant to commit murder, but I confess that I thought he intended to use the letter in some scheme for robbing his half-brother.

"On the day after the murder Hoathley came to me in London and informed me of the failure of his plans—how he had brought Blakesly to the spot by means of the forged letter, and how he had himself killed Michael Standbridge, only to find that he was unable to open the strong-room because he could not discover the key.

"He also told me that he had provided for suspicion falling on Blakesly by setting fire to the furze at the roadside so that he might be seen by witnesses on his return. The story told by Blakesly at the inquest about the trapped kitten was perfectly true. The kitten and the trap were brought there by Hoathley, and the animal was placed in the trap and deposited by the gate when Mr. Standbridge and the cashier came to the door. The ruse was successful in leaving the coast clear for Hoathley to slip into the house, and it served the double purpose of getting bloodstains on to Blakesly's clothes. Hoathley further informed me that he supplemented the manufactured evidence by cutting his own wrist purposely and letting the blood drop on the bell of the bicycle, so that human blood might be found in the event of analysis.

"Hoathley hid behind the sitting-room door, and when Standbridge returned to the room stabbed him in the back. He wiped his weapon on an envelope which he picked up from the floor, and which he recognised as being the one I had forged. Mr. Blakesly must have dropped it during the evening.

"Out of a spirit of devilment, and to puzzle the police, Hoathley put the envelope in the tobacco jar on the mantel-piece, but after he came away he saw that he had made a mistake. If Blakesly had really committed the crime he would have destroyed or taken the envelope right away—not hidden it where it was likely to be discovered. However, the envelope was not at first found by the police, and seeing that it was not produced at the inquest. Hoathley determined to recover it on his second visit. It had then disappeared from the tobacco-jar, and would doubtless have been used by the police as a point against Blakesly at the trial."

"That envelope has led to the present development," put in Zambra quietly, to the great surprise of the already crestfallen Inspector Dimmock and the group of policemen who accompanied him.

"I was upset by the turn the matter had taken," proceeded Tasker, "and I wanted to have done with Hoathley, but he pointed out that I was compromised as an accessory, and had better stick to him. As soon as we saw in the papers that the strong room was found empty, we came to the conclusion that the money was hidden somewhere—as like as not built up in the strong-room walls or floor. He went down to the neighbourhood on the Monday—the day of the inquest—and the next morning, disguised in the character of an American detective, learned that the police had been unsuccessful in their search for the——"

"Good Heavens," groaned Dimmock, "did he take the name of Keeling?"

"That was it, I think."

"And I called him a kindred spirit," murmured the unfortunate detective under his breath.

"He found that some constables were guarding the house day and night," proceeded Tasker, "but he relied on them being withdrawn in a day or two—as, in fact they were—though our plans for getting into the house and ransacking it at our leisure were frustrated by Miss Standbridge having taken up her residence there. Hoathley made this discovery at Mrs. Bonfield's, where he had called on the chance of picking up some useful information. There being only an unprotected woman now at Kennett's Cross, he determined to go there at once to recover the envelope and search for traces of the hoard, and in order to gain Miss Standbridge's confidence, and access to the house, he represented himself as her uncle and a clergyman. He had found from the clergy list that the rector of a distant country parish bore the name and had the same initial, which he thought would justify appearances in the event of inquiries being made before he gained his end. I believe he would have murdered the young lady that night, and broken down the strong room if he had not been afraid that I might split if I was not in it with him.

Keew txen snigeb frawd nedlog eht.

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"He came back to town and assured me that the money could be nowhere else but in the strong-room walls, and as he said he could not pull the place down single-handed, he insisted on my accompanying him. The final arrangements were made at Tamponi's Restaurant, and while there we were warned that the waiter who was attending us was Zambra, the well-known detective. He had been recognised by a person in the bar who had seen him in a similar disguise some time ago. Hoathley disabled Mr. Zambra, and we came to Reading by the last train, thinking that there would be plenty of time to complete the job before the railway or telegraph would be available. I can only say that I had no intention myself of harming the young lady."

"And very little intention of preventing Hoathley from doing so, I imagine," said the superintendent, closing his note-book. "Get the prisoners away as quick as you can, and have that man's leg attended to," he continued, addressing a sergeant, and, as the central setting of a cluster of blue coats, Hoathley and Tasker disappeared for ever from the scene of their villainy.

The superintendant and Dimmock remained behind to confer with Marion and Zambra about extracting the gold from the wall. The operation, which was subsequently carried out by Ferguson, in the presence of the police, yielded in all the sum of £14,180, which, allowing for the money expended on the purchase of Kennett's Cross, that remaining in the bank, and the amount used for his own purposes, represented the sum which Michael should have had in his possession.

When the procession guarding the prisoners had passed round the corner of the house, the rest gathered round Marion to hear the story of the night, and to congratulate her on her pluck in holding out till help arrived. But she could not forget quite so quickly the suspicion which Gunning and Dimmock had fastened on her lover.

"I think you should remember that if it had not been for Mr. Zambra there would have been no help to wait for," she said.

"I quite allow that," said Dimmock, who, divested of officialism, was not a bad fellow, "but I shall never forgive myself for not finding that envelope."

"Don't take that to heart," said Zambra; "*I* didn't find it. It was the young lady who brought that to light. And I don't mean to take any credit to myself, but rather to the scientific methods which are my speciality, when I say that the envelope was a good deal better in my hands than yours."

And he told the astonished officials of the hidden postmark which had given him the first clue to the criminals.

"But after all," said Zambra, "it is not you only who have to regret shortcomings. It is a singular fact that I never bring a case to a successful conclusion without finding on looking back that somewhere in the course of it I have bungled."

"Not in this case, surely?" asked Dimmock, rather eagerly.

"Yes," replied Zambra, "and my mistake might have cost me my life, and my client hers. I should have allowed for the possibility of recognition, closely disguised as I was, in such a place as Tamponi's. If it had not been for the smartness of a lad in my employment that knock on the head might have caused fatal loss of time. But the boy—he will make a name some day—was equal to the emergency. He has been keeping communication between myself and my office, and had been given the tip to stick to Tasker and Hoathley in case they left the restaurant without me in attendance. But having managed to hear their directions to the cabman, he remained to try and get me out of my fix, and succeeded by means of a ruse that must be making the smart crowd on whom he played it feel pretty sick by now. The proprietor might have objected to violence, but he would have been powerless to prevent the other blackguards keeping me there—out of spite, for of course they did not know that a girl's life depended on my getting free. Once out of the place I was soon myself.

"They soon brought me to, and I was able to hurry to Paddington and engage a special engine to Reading, where we were fortunate enough to enlist your invaluable assistance."

"I suppose," said Marion, as they walked back to the house, "that there is no doubt that the secret my father spoke of was the secret of the wall."

"Unquestionably," said Zambra. "My impression is that he would have imparted it to you very shortly as soon as he had assured himself that your engagement to Mr. Blakesly was desirable. The hiding of the gold was evidently a hobby with him, and he did not like to part with it until he felt certain of your happiness. It is possible he meant to tell you on your wedding day.

"One thing is clearly explained," continued Zambra. "This man Hoathley was evidently the cause of your father's apprehension of danger to himself and to his property. After picking up the Tasker clue at Strauss' office and before going to Worcester Park, I procured a list of the *Trojan's* passengers for the voyage when Mr. Standbridge returned. Hoathley was on board, and I have no doubt that it was to escape him that your father attempted to give him the slip by changing his name and getting ashore unseen. How he accomplished this I do not yet know; but I may be able to ascertain."

As a matter of fact, the point was cleared up later by the signalman at Hurst Castle, who came forward on reading of the case, and described his midnight visitor.

And now the mystery of Kennett's Cross is told. That same afternoon Cuthbert Blakesly was admitted to bail. Having been committed, he had to be tried at the Assizes, but he was immediately acquitted, and was called as a principal witness at the trial of Hoathley. The latter recovered sufficiently to stand in the dock, and being convicted of the murder of Michael Standbridge, was hanged in due course of the law. His face, when Zambra in the witness-box related what he had heard at Tamponi's, and produced the cat's fur which he had extracted from Hoathley's overcoat pocket, was a picture of malevolent hate. In the murder trial Tasker was allowed to give evidence for the Queen, but he was afterwards tried for the separate charges of forgery and burglary, and was sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Kennett's Cross was razed to the ground, but nearer the town there is a pretty cottage where Marion and Cuthbert are always glad to see their friends. Among the latter must be reckoned Mrs. Bonfield, who long since apologetic and reconciled, is sure of a welcome whenever she runs over from The Limes.

"I owe the dear old soul so much, and I treated her so badly," Marion says sometime; and then she will add: "But I had no thought of any that awful week—save for one."

And Cuthbert, in the full knowledge of what his brave wife did for him, quite understands.

THE END.

THE GOLDEN DWARF.

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, June 24th. Postcards only, please. The prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. W. Burns, of 7 Nelson Street, Long Eaton, Derbyshire, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

THE feet that are covered with bunions may not be stylish, but they are certainly "knobby."

SHE: "Those people next door are still on their honeymoon." He: "Do you think so?" She "Yes; he goes shopping with her."

"I AM told your wife would rather cook than eat," "What she cooks, yes," he replied in a hoarse whisper. The other glanced nervously over his shoulder. They were alone.

TOTO (in tears): "Boo-oo-oo!" Papa: "What's the matter with that boy now?" Toto: "Oh, pa, I've swallowed one of the cartridges of your revolver." Papa: "You little wretch. And I can't even give you a thrashing for fear of exploding the cartridge."

"BY Jove! that's a pretty girl!" said one of the travellers, throwing himself half out of the window to see her. "For Heaven's sake pull in your head!" shouted his companion. "What's the matter?" was the terrified inquiry. "Why"—suiting the action to the word—"I want that window to look at her myself."

A CLERK in a Manchester office, who was a bit of a sprinter, was always talking about sports. "Athletics on the brain," remarked the chief to himself one day. This knight of the "pump" had been repeatedly cautioned about neglecting his work and taking up his fellow clerks' time with his descriptions of last Saturday's meeting, but they evidently fell on deaf ears, for his "boss" time after time caught words pertaining to sports. In the middle of one of his discourses he was saying, "the turn out for the mile handicap was extra, and——" but he was interrupted by his chief standing behind him, saying: "Go and get your hat and coat and 'turn out' for the sack race."

* IN New Zealand, as elsewhere, it is the fashion to give prize cattle high-sounding names; so when Mrs. J—— received a message from her husband, who was attending the session in town, asking her to send to Wairito station to meet the Duke of Manchester, who was visiting New Zealand, she naturally thought he meant another prize bull he had been speculating in, and on the day appointed sent down a man on horseback, with a good stout tether-rope, to convey the Duke to his new home. The man was at the station in time. The train arrived, two gentlemen got out, and the train went on again. "Is there anyone here to meet the Duke of Manchester?" asked one of the gentlemen. "Here I be's," said the man, coming forward, "an' here be's the rope to tether 'un. But where be's the Juke?"

"CECIL VAN DUNSE gave me a piece of his mind to-day." "I noticed you weren't as brilliant as usual."

SKIED.—Palette: "We bow to the works of the old masters." Smiler: "Yes; but, dear boy, reflect that if they were on earth they'd have to look up to yours."

A CLERGYMAN on a recent sultry afternoon paused in his sermon and said: "I saw an advertisement last week for 500 sleepers on a railroad. I think I could supply fifty, and recommend them as tried and sound."

TEACHER: "You may tell us, Tommy, some of the ways in which the element of fire confers a benefit on the human race." Tommy (who knows something of his father's business methods: "When the amount of the insurance exceeds the value of the stock on hand."

HUSBAND (after a quarrel with his wife): "Well, let us drop it. I don't care to have any words about it, and besides I like to talk to a sensible person when I am talking." Wife (with a sarcastic laugh): "You don't always do it then." H.: "I don't?" W.: "No. I sometimes hear you talking to yourself."

ACTRESS: "Say, Mr. Poster, I see you are sending paragraphs to the papers saying that I am getting a salary of £100 a week, one of the largest salaries ever paid to an actress." Manager: "Yes, I am; it's a good advertisement for you, you know." Actress: "Well, all I have to say about it is that I want a raise of salary to £10. I never work for less than ten per cent. of my advertised salary."

SCENE—The gaming table at Monte Carlo. Young English lady with her little sister and a gentleman whose acquaintance they had recently made while travelling. Young Lady: "Now, I shall just try one five-franc piece on the number of my age," putting one on number eighteen. Number twenty-seven wins. Little sister: "Oh, Maud, what fun! Now, if you had put it on your right age you would have won, wouldn't you?"

AN old lady, who was visiting a garrison town for the first time in her life, was much startled when the customary gun was fired at sunset. "Bless me, what ever's the matter?" she inquired in a fright. "It's only the sunset, ma'am," replied the landlady reassuringly. "You don't say so!" exclaimed the old lady more amazed than ever. "Why, in London, the sun sets as quietly as anything, but perhaps we don't hear the bang on account of the traffic," she conceded after a moment's meditation.

AN artist had sold a picture for an exorbitant price, and the purchaser sued to recover. The barrister for the purchaser was making the artist uncomfortable by his questions. "Now, sir," he said, in that pleasant, ingratiating manner of lawyers with a witness, "do you think anybody could see beauty in that picture?" "Some persons certainly could," replied the artist. "You think the initiated in technical matters might have no difficulty in understanding your work?" "I am sure they would not." "Do you think you could make me see any beauty in that picture?"—this most superciliously. "Probably not now, sir," and the artist was most humble, "but once I could have done so easily." "Now, sir, how is that? I don't understand you. Explain, if you please." "That's quite easy, sir, I could have done it simply by employing you as my counsel in this case."

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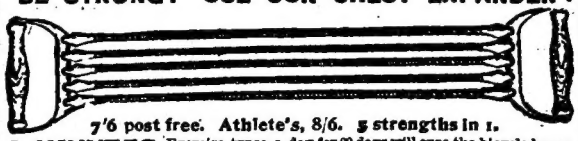

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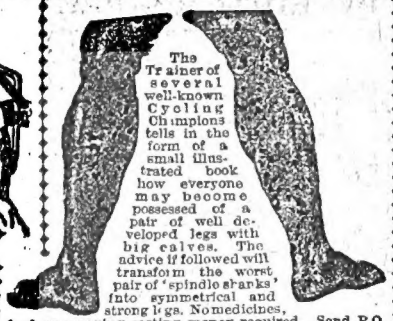

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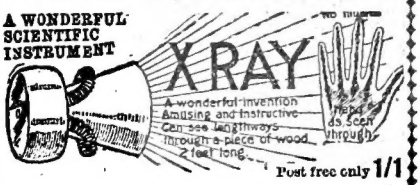
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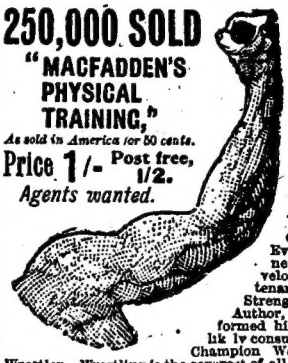

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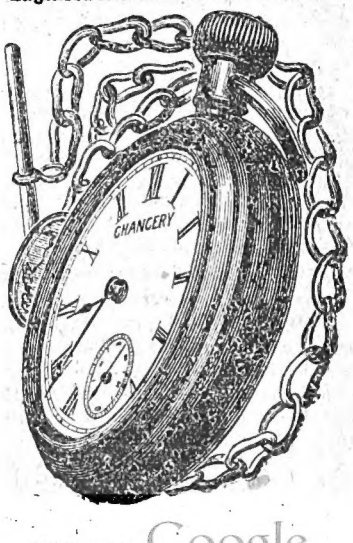

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

Next week's issue will be the number of numbers. For in that will appear the opening chapters of

"The Golden Dwarf."

Into this great story Mr. R. Norman Silver has put his very best work. With that wondrous ingenuity for which he is famous, he has woven a plot which you will be clever indeed to solve before the author himself comes to your assistance. This baffling mystery runs throughout the story, while an undercurrent of pure and tender love winds its way through the troubled waters—but there! I won't go on. I might divulge too much of the story, and I don't want to do that.

❦❦❦

"The Golden Dwarf" is going to do a lot for *Short Stories*. It is going to obtain for it tens of thousands of new enthusiastic readers. That is a point I am quite certain about. For the story is one which cannot fail to make people talk about it. There is only one point on which I am a little anxious. That is that many people will be disappointed in not being able to get next week's *Short Stories*. The demand is certain to be greatly in excess of the supply, and those who do not take the precaution of ordering the paper beforehand will probably "get left."

❦❦❦

"Percy."—The average weight of a man is 140 pounds; of a woman, 125.

Lunatics are smaller than sane people, and are seldom fat. On the other hand, centenarians are also generally small-boned and lean.

The blood completes its circuit through the body in twenty-two seconds, and in three minutes every drop passes through the heart and lungs and is revitalised.

Figure this out. A drop of blood will travel 61,320 miles a year. In eighty-four years a blood corpuscle would travel 5,150,808 miles.

For that matter, a reasonably active man walks about 297,200 miles—more than ten times the earth's circumference—in eighty-four years, just trotting about his house and office.

❦❦❦

"Recruit."—An old cavalry man says that a horse will never step on a man intentionally. It is a standing order in the British cavalry that, should a man become dismounted, he must lie down and keep perfectly still. If he does so, the entire troop will pass over him without his being injured. A horse notices where he is going, and is on the look-out for a firm foundation to put his foot on. It is an instinct with him, therefore, to step over a prostrate man. The injuries caused to human beings by a runaway horse are nearly always inflicted by the animal knocking them down, and not by his stepping on them.

❦❦❦

"Loch Lomond."—Freckles are the result of too much iron in the blood, and the sun's rays bring the iron-stained spots to the surface. In other words, freckles are iron rust. Face bleaches said to remove freckles are very dangerous compounds to have any dealings with. They are made almost without exception of a solution of corrosive sublimate and water, and are extremely painful as well as dangerous. But here is a formula for the removal of freckles which has been tried with surprising success. It is as follows. It has the advantage of being harmless:

Four ounces lactic acid.
Two ounces glycerine.
One ounce rose water.

Apply with a small soft sponge two or three times daily.

This lotion will cause a slight burning of the skin, which is part of the process of extinction of freckles. The use of a little witchhazel cream to the irritated surface will allay the burning. Witchhazel cream is made as follows:

One ounce each of white wax and spermaceti, and one quarter pint of almonds. Melt, pour the mixture into a mortar which has been heated by being immersed for some time in boiling water; add very gradually three ounces of rose water and one ounce of witchhazel, and assiduously stir the mixture until an emulsion is formed, and afterwards until the mixture is nearly cold. Or you can get any chemist to prepare the prescription. Suit the use of the freckle lotion to the condition of your skin. It is never intended to produce more than a slight superficial redness. If the redness and burning are uncomfortable, omit the freckle lotion for a day or two, using the witchhazel cream meantime. Be careful of nostrums warranted to do impossible things in a few hours.

❦❦❦

"Carberry."—The inhabitants of Gomera Island, one of the Canaries, converse with each other by whistling. A German officer, who has spent some time on the island, describes the whistling language as follows:

It consists of the ordinary speech of the natives, expressed by articulate whistling. Each syllable has its own appropriate tone.

The whistler uses both fingers and lips, and it is asserted that conversation can be kept up at a distance of a mile. Whistling is said to be confined to Gomera Island, and to be quite unknown on the other islands of the group.

The adoption of this mode of carrying on conversation is due to the geological formation of the island, which is intersected by frequent gullies and ravines. As there are no bridges across the ravines, intercourse between neighbours is often difficult.

A man living within a stone's throw of another may have to go many miles around to make a call upon his neighbour, and the inconvenience of intercourse caused the gradual formation of a whistling language.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 4,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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